Familiar/Foreign: Collecting and Exhibiting the Orient in Early-Modern Europe. An Anthropological Analysis Supported by Visual and Historical Sources.

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Familiar/Foreign:

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An Anthropological Analysis Supported by Visual and Historical Sources.

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Abstract

The topic I discuss in this work is that of the practices of collecting and exhibiting of *Orientalia* at the turn of the Early-Modern period in Europe. In particular, I focus on the setting up of rooms dedicated to the showcasing of goods coming from the Orient and analyse how the exhibiting practices altered the perception of the Orient in the European societies of that period. The main research question upon which this whole work is hinged is: how did the collecting and exhibiting practices of *Orientalia* change in Western society during the Early-Modern period, to what degree can the evolution of these practices be seen as a way for Westerners to familiarise with the Orient, and with what consequences for the understanding of the Orient in European Early-Modern society?

In order to find an answer to this question, the analysis I propose here is devoted to the study of several objects, spaces and practices, not only from a historical but also theoretical perspective. The central case study of this work is the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room (assembled in Leeuwarden at the end of the 17th century). However, this study takes its steps from an analysis of the way *Orientalia* were treated during the Middle Age and Late Renaissance and surveys the shift which took place during the Early-Modern period and the reasons behind it. Such a historical analysis takes place in the first two chapters of this work, where I first focus on Europe in general and then specifically to the case of the Early-Modern Netherlands.

The last two chapters of this work are instead dedicated to a discussion linked to the theoretical aspects regarding the collections of *Orientalia* and their showcasing in Oriental-style Rooms. In particular, I focus on the concepts of domestication and on the agency of objects, and later on issues related to Orientalism and that of collecting as a gendered practice. Starting from this analysis I propose further insights on the conception of the Orient in the context of Early-Modern Netherlands and suggest new prompts for future research.

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Likewise, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Pieter ter Keurs who, although I have never attended any of his classes (yet!) has decided to place his trust into my thesis project and has often proposed new and challenging ways to develop it. Furthermore, I feel it is mandatory to express my gratitude to all of my previous mentors I have been honoured to meet and by whom I have had the chance to learn not only in terms of notions, but also in terms of ethics and academic integrity. It is thanks to their teachings if I have begun to look 'into' rather than simply looking 'at' things. As one of them would say at the beginning of a course their purpose as teachers, and that of university at large, was to "expose the students to as many incentives as possible" (I did not write down the sentence as it was pronounced, but it definitely was along these lines) and I believe the last years have been incredibly fruitful for my growth, both as a student and as a person, thanks to their activity. Of course, I believe it is mandatory to thank Dr. Jan van Campen, who has supported my work several times during these years and with whom I hope to keep cooperating in the near future.

On top of that, I would like to thank all the people who have supported me in the last couple of months during my stay in Rome: first of all, the whole KNIR staff. Without them, and without the precious resources I had the chance to study while in Rome, while at the KNIR Library or at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, this research would have not been possible. In particular I would like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Matthijs Jonker, Prof. Stefano Pierguidi, and Prof. Giorgio Riello for their insightful feedback on the topic and for debating with me in a way that has proven extremely useful for the final result. And finally, a huge, heartfelt thank goes to all of my friends, for their continuous support in the darkest of times, and to Manuel, for the last, happy months we have spent together while I was busy writing this.

Preface

"Van alle dingen, hoedanich die sijn, neempt die tegenwoerdicheyt de verwonderinge af…ende de ongehoortheyt maect alle dingen verwonderlick."

"Our wonder at all things, however they are, diminishes when they are near, but the distance and unfamiliarity make everything wonderful."

Aernout van Buchel, "VOC-dagboek, 1619-1639" fol. 133r

The decision to dedicate the final work of these three intense years to this topic stems from several courses and experiences that I have had the chance to attend and do not only during my years at Leiden University, but even before, during my years in Venice. During this exceptionally long path (although its beginning feels just like yesterday) I have entered in contact with different topics, suggestions, and incentives coming from a variety of fields and deriving from several experiences I have had the chance to do.

Over the years I have realized that, although most of the topics I was studying were related to various aspects of Asia, my main interest lied more into the obsession Europe had for the Orient and the way such an impalpable, blurry, and sometimes undefined entity was given material shape and identity by Westerners during different periods. Hence, I have chosen to dedicate this study to the material embodiments given to such a concept by the Early-Modern European societies, conceived and actively built upon the scarce knowledge available and constantly nourished and corroborated by ideas conceived in Europe. My hope is to provide readers with a study that is sufficiently meaningful to explain the way Orient was pictured in the mind of Europeans back then, what does the act of collecting and displaying *Orientalia* mean and what are the consequences of such activities. In a sense, Europeans have always been aware of the smallness of their own continent and have often looked for something that was different and exotic.

In fact, what I believe is that these activities and their material outcomes are not that relevant to understand the Orient, or China, or Asia at large, but instead are meaningful to understand the minds, the ambitions, and obsessions of Early-Modern Westerners. Several scholars, amongst which some I mention later in this work, as S. W.

Foster, have dealt with the concept of exotic in Western culture. Nevertheless, I believe the quote above, by the Dutch humanist Aernout van Buchel (1565-1641), effectively sums up the main problem: how do we deal with what we perceive as foreign, alien and strange? We may want to domesticate, frame it within logical categories that we perceive as ours and allow us to understand it, although that would entail a loss of those sensations of awe and wonder we would attribute to it at a first glance. Therefore, as van Buchel argues, we may want to keep it far away, so that it does maintain that fascination. Orient would represent that place of expectations, both terrible and amazing, where everything was – and it still is, to a certain degree – perceived as possible.

Such expectations have been given different materializations and representations in the West, from medieval to modern visual, decorative arts, and literature. Sometimes these representations have tended to a more substantial degree to realism (although it is worth keeping in mind that representation is always a form of approximation), some other have left more space for the imagination and the expectations of the author to wander freely. Albeit this work is focussed on a particular product of the European imagination of the Orient, the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, conceived in an extremely specific setting, I hope it will provide readers with tools for a broader comprehension of the European (Dutch, in this case) societies of the Early-Modern period, the way they would envision and give material form to the Orient.

Introduction

1. the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room – Close-up

The topic I explore in this work is the role of *Orientalia* and that of the birth and early developments of Oriental-style Rooms (on the use of this term I return later in the introduction) in Early-Modern Western Europe and, more specifically, in the Netherlands. In particular, I focus on the changes that took place during the 17th century in the collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* in comparison with the previous centuries. My work stems from the principle that, although several studies have been dedicated to the space I present here, the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room in Amsterdam (originally assembled in Leeuwarden, Friesland), a specific framework for the comprehension of these spaces at large is still partly lacking. Hence, although my case study for this work is the Lacquer Room which constitutes the very core and the central case study of this thesis, I employ this as a starting point to discuss wider issues. The room I discuss here, and these spaces in general, can certainly be categorized as being an expression, or at least as closely related, of

the phenomenon of *Chinoiserie*, on which the scholarship has this far produced a remarkable amount of books and research. That of *Chinoiserie* is, as I explore throughout this work, the example of an artistic fashion that has transcended the borders over the centuries, with different developments depending on time and place. However, the enclosed nature of these spaces adds a further layer of complexity to their analysis and therefore I believe they deserve to be treated as an object *per se*, not exclusively as a manifestation of *Chinoiserie*. Their specificity stems from their spatial configuration, and from the relationship established between the objects they house and the visuality these produce, which in turn surrounds their visitors.

First, I argue, it is necessary to clarify and pinpoint the genealogical relationship between Oriental-style Rooms and Late Renaissance and Early-Modern Wunderkammers. Secondly, I believe it is necessary to highlight and further investigate the function played by the objects collected in these rooms during the Early-Modern period for Western societies. Third, it is necessary to understand the meaning of these rooms for their visitors and the way they would "use" them. However, I am aware of the massive proportions such a work might have if developed as extensively as it would deserve. Hence, although to get a comprehensive view of the phenomenon I refer to a number of objects, rooms, and collections throughout this thesis, I have chosen to specifically focus on the abovementioned room: the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room (ca. 1695, **fig.1**). I have selected this example in particular since it represents the earliest surviving model of an Oriental-style Room in the Netherlands. However, to provide readers with the instruments to understand the broader field of Oriental-style Rooms, I first describe the collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* from the Late Middle Age to the 17th century in Western Europe and focus on the specific context of the Netherlands, to pinpoint homogeneous or disruptive patterns in these practices. The main research question upon which this whole work is hinged is: how did the collecting and exhibiting practices of *Orientalia* change in Western society during the Early-Modern period, to what degree can the evolution of these practices be seen as a way for Westerners to familiarise with the Orient, and with what consequences for the understanding of the Orient in European Early-Modern society?[1]

To develop a coherent and relevant reasoning to this scope, I have structured this work in a specific way to underline some conceptual tools I deem meaningful to explore

[1] Instead of employing geographic terms to address an area, such as "Asia", here I am intentionally using the term 'Orient' here, since I refer to the discrepancy between the 'real' Orient (meant in geographic terms – commonly used to address regions located to the East of Europe) and the 'imaginary' one (meant as a product of European imagination, to which I refer throughout this work, unless specified). A similar discrepancy is the one between *China* and *Cathay*, as observed by Honour in *Chinoiserie,* 5-8.

such a topic. The main concept, or, better, couple of concepts is that of foreign and familiar, meant as if they were situated on opposite ends of a spectrum. In fact, one of the main points this works aims at clarifying is the relationship between Westerners and exotic (in this case oriental) objects as a history of their domestication within a European setting or, instead, one that keeps on identifying those objects (as an extension of the cultures that produced them) as foreign. Then, I intend to highlight the consequences this process for the conception of the Orient in Early-Modern Western society. In fact, the relationship (and the way this would change) established between Westerners and Oriental objects can be seen as a lens through which it is possible to explore the understanding and the conception of the Orient in the West.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main fields I refer to is that concerned with the study of *Chinoiserie*, so that the context in which the setting up of these rooms can be reconstructed clearly and consistently. In particular, four books have been fundamental to understand more not only about the phenomenon of *Chinoiserie* and what preceded it, but also to understand the relationship between European societies and the Orient in its evolution throughout the centuries. Although they partly share the title, they all have a slightly different focus and stress upon distinct aspects of this phenomenon: *Chinoiserie: the Vision of Cathay* (1961), which has been of paramount importance in the field, written by the English art historian Hugh Honour. This was then followed by a volume by the English curator Oliver Impey: *Chinoiserie. The impact of Oriental styles on Western art and decoration* (1977) and other two of a more recent publication: *Chinoiserie* (1993), by the South African scholar Dawn Jacobson and the fourth one by the Italian scholar Francesco Morena, which focuses more on the developments in Italy: *Chinoiserie. The Evolution of the Oriental Style in Italy from the 14th to the 19th Century* (2009). Each of these books focuses on different areas and scopes, but combined they provide a rich and accurate view of the field and its developments through time and space. Nevertheless, although acknowledging the importance of the Netherlands in the development of *Chinoiserie,* none of these volumes focuses primarily on the developments of such an artistic fashion in the Early-Modern Netherlands, hence leaving a remarkable gap in the literature. Such a gap was however partly filled in by some more recent works, such as the chapter included within the edited volume *Chinese and Japanese porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (2014) or, to a broader extent, by Simon Schama's book, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (1987) which has a more historical and sociological approach to the Dutch society of the 17th century. My work aims

at further reinforcing the awareness that a remarkable shift in the practices of collecting and displaying of *Orientalia* originated in Early-Modern Netherlands. In addition to that, I am referring to the monumental work of the American scholar Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (3 volumes, published between 1965 and 1993), that possibly provides the most comprehensive analysis of all the exchanges that have taken place between Asia and Europe, and in particular the influence of Asia *on* Europe. For the scope of this work, the first book of volume 2, *The Visual Arts* (1970), is particularly meaningful.

In addition to that, a second theoretical axis of this work is that directly connected to *Chinoiserie* meant as a form of representation of other cultures, therefore linked to the theories on Orientalism deriving from the work of the Palestinian-American scholar Edward W. Said (1935-2003). His book, *Orientalism* (1978), has been of paramount importance to reconsider the relationship between East and West. Although it has been the subject of several scholar controversies, the arguments it pushes forward still permeate the scholarship nowadays, and it is a key text to understand several issues linked to post-colonial issues. In conversation with Said's book, I put two more recent products of the scholarship on the topic, to assess how the debate has evolved in more recent years. One of these books has been written by one of the harshest opponents of Said's work: Robert Irwin, whose book *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalist and Their Enemies* (2007) rediscusses and criticizes Said's arguments in depth. The second book I have chosen to provide a comprehensive view on the topic, is Urs App's *The Birth of Orientalism* (2010). Said's and Irwin's works focus more on Middle East, although the concepts expressed in their book can be, to an extent, applied to the whole Orient. App's book, instead, aims at reconstructing the vision of East Asian countries by selected thinkers of the Modern Age, thus filling the gaps and, most importantly, clarifying the role played by the concepts expressed by Said, and assessing their non-applicability to the Asian continent as a whole. These sources on orientalist discourses are then further supported and discussed through the lens of visual studies, namely Linda Nochlin's essay, "The Imaginary Orient" (in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on 19th Century Art and Society,* 1989), which discusses the rationale behind the origins of Orientalist painting. Furthermore, this work is draws heavily on the analysis made by the American scholar Benjamin Schmidt (2015) on the representations of the Orient in Early-Modern Dutch books and how this phenomenon corroborated and further influenced an exotic vision of Asia.

Finally, attention will be paid to other similar concepts, such as those of cultural hybridity and transculturality. Over the last decades, scholars have proposed disparate

definitions of transculturality, due to a renewed interest in the social dimensions and lives of objects travelling from one cultural sphere to another. This is chiefly rooted in Appadurai's seminal work *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986) which has opened new perspectives on the meanings and cultural role played by objects, especially when they enter a context that is different from the one of their conception. The power of objects to evoke cultures also resonates in the article by Caroline van Eck, Miguel John Versluys and Pieter ter Keurs, "The biography of cultures: style, object and agency. Proposal for an interdisciplinary approach" (2015).

As I explain throughout this work, the influence of objects and their collecting practices are relevant for the construction not only of these spaces, but also of the narratives these produce by the meanings attributed to them. Therefore, I also relied upon other books that have dealt with the issues of cross-cultural trade between Asia and Europe in the Early-Modern period, such as the book by Teresa Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer: China and Japan and Their Trade with Western Europe and the New World, 1500-1644*, which has been of paramount importance to help me reconstruct the evolution in the trade of luxury goods from East Asian countries to Europe in the Early-Modern period and several other articles which inspect single objects I discuss throughout this work. For a general overview on the cultures of porcelain in Europe I have employed as reference points Robert Finlay's *The Pilgrim Art. Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (2010) and Suzanne L. Marchand's *Porcelain. A History from the Heart of Europe* (2020). Whereas the former is dedicated to the exchanges taking place between China and Europe, the latter is exclusively dedicated to the production of porcelain (and previous attempts of imitation) in Europe, with a meaningful focus on the Dutch production of Delftware. For a critical analysis on the mounting practices undergone by *Orientalia* in Europe I have referred to the work by Anna Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames. Displaying Foreign Collectibles in Early Modern China and Europe* (2019) as well as to other studies on the topic of cultural remediation and global connection, such as the chapter written by the American art historian Dawn Odell, "Delftware and the Domestication of Chinese Porcelain" part of the edited volume *EurAsian Matters: China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600–1800* (2018). On the wider issue and themes of cultural hybridity, I have employed the book by Peter Burke with the same name (2009).

The relationship between Oriental-style Rooms and other spaces dedicated to collecting and exhibiting practices, such as Renaissance Wunderkammers is instead explored and analysed through the lens of the theoretical framework proposed by Eilean

Cooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992). To gain further insights and reflections on the practices and collecting over time, and especially when these practices are about collecting and representing something perceived as other, alien and different, I refer to the studies developed by the British scholar Susan M. Pearce, who has written extensively on the topic. The semiotic approach for the study of collections she proposes throughout her books, *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (1993), and the edited volumes *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1994), *On Collecting. An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (1995) has been of a remarkable importance for my study, especially for what regards the practices of the representation of other cultures through exhibiting. Finally, at least for what regards the theoretical aspects of museum-related practices, of fundamental importance has been the essay by the American literary criticist Stephan Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," published within the volume edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (1991). The aforementioned essay has been of paramount importance to understand the reasons behind the set-up of Oriental-style Rooms and their relationship with Wunderkammers in a critical perspective.

The work is divided into four chapters: the first one – mostly historical – introduces the general context where the phenomena of collecting and exhibiting *Orientalia* took place over the centuries in Europe. It contains an exhaustive, although streamlined, account of the general tendencies and the main events related to such practices from the Middle Age up until the Modern Age in Europe. Such an account is necessary to provide readers the tools to understand these practices at large and in their evolution throughout the centuries. The focus here is on the homogeneity in the practices of collecting and displaying *Orientalia* through the centuries or its disruption. As such, the chapter is mostly based upon what was written by the previous scholarships, chiefly in terms of trade and collecting history.

The second chapter is dedicated to the culture of *Orientalia* during the Early-Modern Period in the Netherlands, starting from the assumption that such imagery takes its steps from previous materials and sources and is further amplified by the making and the spread of Oriental-style Rooms. There, an in-depth visual and material analysis of the Lacquer Room takes place, starting of course from its surrounding context. So far, the only comparative work on Oriental-style Rooms I have found is an edited volume based on a conference that took place in Vienna in 2013, *Investigation and Conservation of East Asian Cabinets in Imperial Residences (1700-1900): Lacquerware & Porcelain* (2015).

However, although gathering a remarkable number of articles on these rooms, this collection of essays provides a focus, as the title explains, on the interventions for their preservation that have taken place in the last decades, rather than offering a theoretical framework for their understanding as an *object*, which is instead what I would like to propose here. Furthermore, it suggests, as an all-encompassing name for this type of enclosed spaces, the term *East Asian Cabinets*. An issue that is central to this work is that of the term used to address these spaces. The use of the term *cabinet* is certainly meaningful to reconnect this type of enclosed space to the collections of curiosities that were set up in the Late Renaissance and in the Early-Modern Age, also known by the term *Wunderkammer*. Such a connection has already been underlined by Impey in his book, *Chinoiserie*. [2] The term *cabinet* recalls a private, rather small space where a collection of curiosities (then catalogued under the different categories of *Naturalia, Artificialia*, and so forth) would be showcased according to the epistemic rules of the past.[3] Other terms were also employed to pinpoint this type of space, such as *kunstcamer* or *rariteytencamer* (in the Dutch environment) or *studiolo* (in the Italian environment).[4] All these terms were used in parallel with the scholar language of that period, Latin, employing other terms such as *theatrum* and, sometimes, *museum* (it is however worth mentioning that these last two terms do come, in turn, from Ancient Greek).[5] The term I propose here to indicate these spaces as a whole is instead Oriental-style Rooms, chiefly for two reasons: first, whereas the Cabinets of Curiosities of the Early-Modern period where certainly also used to host guests (and have them wonder at the view of the objects showcased), they were mostly spaces for personal reflection, that scholars would employ to stay in idleness in order to study their collection.[6] The rooms I mention here are however quite different in terms of purpose: albeit these were also used to contain collections of *Orientalia* (on the specific use of this term I return in the first chapter) they would lose the features of a place meant for study. Some of these, such as the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room were indeed used for private, small gatherings (chiefly of noblewomen and their ladies-in-waiting), whereas

[2] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 57.
[3] For an in-depth analysis of the evolution in the collecting and displaying practices, and mostly for the epistemic rules underlying them, the volume I refer to is Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992), which possibly constitutes the most comprehensive (and comprehensible) book in the field.
[4] For the terms employed in the Dutch-speaking world, see: Swan, *Rarities of These Lands*, 98.
[5] For an account of the terms used in different languages to indicate these spaces, see: Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 88-89.
[6] The idea that this type of space was mostly for private use is further confirmed by the term used by the Dutch physician Bernardus Paludanus (1550-1633), one of the main collectors of his time, to describe his study, *conclave*: a private space, lit. 'locked (space)' in Latin (as mentioned in Swan, *Rarities of These Lands,* 98).

others, such as Frederick I of Prussia's (1657-1713) *Porzellanzimmer* in the Charlottenburg Palace were instead way wider, since they were used to host a greater number of guests, possibly for official visits.[7] Thus, to highlight the variety of spaces in the category analysed here I have decided to employ the term *room*, which still conveys the idea of an enclosed space, but also suggests a difference in comparison to the cabinets of the previous period. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, I have decided to employ the term *Orient* rather than the terms referring to the main content of these rooms (e.g. "Rijksmuseum *Lacquer* Room," or "Theresian *Porcelain* Cabinets") or to the encompassing term "East Asian" which refers to the provenience of most of the pieces showcased: Chinese or Japanese porcelain and lacquered pieces. It is indeed true that one of the major features of these spaces is to be filled with objects coming from those countries. However, by taking a slightly different point of view, and by assuming that collections are set up and displayed with a *representational* purpose, that is, to represent the places (or the cultures, at large) the exhibits would come from, these rooms themselves become representative of those same countries. No wonder that these spaces are also called "Japanese" or "Chinese" cabinets. Nevertheless, I believe that this geographical indication does not completely fit the nature of these rooms and, rather than using "East-Asian" as an all-encompassing term, "Oriental" would be a more fitting term, although these might sometimes seem to be overlapping in terms of meaning. One of the main points I argue in this work is, in fact, that the geographic Orient and the visual Orient do differ, and that the second stems from a lack of knowledge whose gaps are deliberately filled by Westerners according to a variety of factors: the period, its aesthetic taste and on the available knowledge, from which visions of the Orient originate. To end this lengthy, but necessary, diversion, and go back to the structure of this work, I argue that the visual Orient is a product of the Western mind extrapolated by the few goods available that produced an imagery stratified and spread during the centuries, and that Oriental Style-Rooms do represent a product of that imagery, as I examine in further depth here.

The third chapter is instead based upon one of the core issues of this work, which is informed by concepts belonging to the field of anthropology. In particular the discussion will revolve around the aforementioned concepts of familiarity and foreignness as categories under which objects may fall in contexts of cultural exchange. Hence, I analyse whether and how objects, originally perceived as foreign in Europe, have undergone processes resulting into their integration in European material culture. In particular, I look

[7] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 57.

at the practices of collecting and exhibiting *Orientalia* in different settings as a way to domesticate objects that were highly culturally charged (meant as openly perceived as Oriental and therefore alien to Western culture) in Europe, and to the results, in visual and anthropological terms, deriving from such processes. The focus of the chapter is therefore on the aforementioned binary couple of concepts of familiarity and otherness. To discuss these concepts, I rely upon what was analysed and proposed by Anna Grasskamp in her book, *Objects in Frames: Displaying Foreign Collectibles in Early Modern China and Europe* (2019), in order to explore concepts related to transcultural objects and transcultural desire, that also appear in the aforementioned works by Burke (2009) and Odell (2018).

Finally, the fourth and last chapter is hinged upon the issues of collecting and exhibiting *Orientalia* in relation with Orientalism, based on the works of the abovementioned scholars and, in turn, with issues related to collecting and exhibiting as gendered practices. From this, an analysis of the way the practices I discuss here may or may not have informed a stereotypical image of the Orient takes its steps. This is also done with the aim of establishing the fundamentals for a comprehensive theoretical framework for the understanding of collections of *Orientalia* and Oriental-style Rooms at large. All the concepts discussed in this work are then briefly surveyed in the conclusion, in order to reconnect them and gain a comprehensive yet concise overview of this work, enriched by other ideas deriving from said concepts.

However, as a final *caveat* before I present my analysis, I would like to specify that this study, although concerned with the culture of *Orientalia* in Europe, does not want to suggest there was one, monolithic culture shared by all European countries. Indeed, part of the cultures related to *Orientalia* in Europe appear to have a mutable, shared degree of commonalities. This emerges even more clearly when it comes to the birth and spread of Oriental-style Rooms which were a prerogative of the aristocracy and thus, their creation was influenced by the demands of fashion of the Early-Modern period and by the connections between noble families, as highlighted by Bischoff (2014).

Chapter 1. The Wider Picture. The European Culture of *Orientalia* over Time

In this chapter I examine the collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* in Western Europe during consecutive periods, so to assess their evolution: first, during the Late Middle Age and the Renaissance and secondly during the Early-Modern period. Although my thesis is, as mentioned in the introduction, chiefly concerned with the Early-Modern period, an account of the practices of collecting and exhibiting before that period is necessary to understand the reasons that made possible a shift in those practices at the turn of the Early-Modern period. Hence, this chapter has a historical approach which aims at illustrating the main events and reasons underlying collecting practices of *Orientalia*, with a specific focus on Chinese porcelain. Although in the first part I try to provide a general overview of Western Europe, in the second part I focus on Early-Modern Netherlands, in order to reconstruct the specific cultural setting where the assembling of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room took place. The main research question of this section is: what were the major features of the European culture of *Orientalia* at the end of the Late Renaissance, and what changes took place at the turn of the Early-Modern period?

Goods coming from the Orient have been collected in Europe ever since ancient times. The earliest textual witnesses of the flow of goods reaching Western Europe from China do date back to the initial stages of the Roman Empire, when both Pliny the Elder (23-after 79 CE) and Seneca (4-65 CE) were complaining about the prices for acquiring silk fabrics, which were already much wished-for by Roman noblewomen in that period.[8] However, the trade between the two countries was not direct. Instead, it was mediated by populations living in-between the two, such as the Parthians, hence the Romans had no direct knowledge of the Chinese, which led to a series of curious assumptions about them.[9] First, silk was believed to be of vegetal origin and grow on trees.[10] Secondly, and most interestingly, the fact that in Latin the term used for the population, called Seres, was directly related to the term used to address silk (Latin *sericum*), highlighting a conflation between the two.[11] The imprecision and vagueness in Pliny's description are certainly to be attributed to his lack of direct knowledge of the population. The gap in the knowledge of Pliny (and possibly of Roman society at large) was therefore filled by impressions and

[8] Morena, *Chinoiserie,* 17.
[9] Ibid., 17.
[10] Ibid., 17.
[11] Whereas the earliest witnesses regarding silk textiles are found in Roman writers such as Seneca and Pliny, it is also worth mentioning that the term Σῆρες also appears in a short passage attributed to the physician Ctesias of Cnidus (440 BCE? – after 397 BCE?) as reported in Coedès, *Textes d'Auteurs Grecs et Latins Relatifs à l'Extrême-Orient*, 1-2.

ideas that had no coherent validation in the real world. One of the main points that have to be kept in mind, as I have briefly mentioned in the introduction, is that the imagery about the Orient (and its consequent material embodiments, be these literary or visual products) is mainly built upon a lack of knowledge whose gaps are filled on the basis of scarce accounts and mostly on the materiality or on the materials of the objects produced by such populations. This becomes more evident during the Modern Age with a remarkable increase in the traffic of lacquer and porcelain from Japan and China respectively, as I later illustrate. Such a phenomenon, regarding a conflation between the traded objects and the countries producing them, would in fact take place again during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The fall of the Western Roman Empire would lead to an overall reduction, but not a total interruption of objects being traded to Western Europe, passing through the territories of the Eastern Roman Empire which was still flourishing back then. Later on, trades were also mediated by the rising Muslim powers in Northern Africa and Western Asia, where large collections of Chinese porcelain were amassed by local rulers.[12] However, also in those areas porcelain did not represent the main element on the whole of trades, but it was only a small percentage if compared to the bulk of silk garments and spices coming from either India, China or Southeast Asia.[13]

The scarcity of findings dating to high medieval Europe that could be connected to trades with East Asia would instead confirm the hypothesis that back then just a fraction of the goods from East Asia would reach Western Europe, following discontinuous, irregular patterns.[14] Chinese silk still represented most of the goods exported in this period to Western Europe, and the textile market kept being of paramount importance in the trades between Asia and Europe.[15] However, although I strongly believe that the story of silk is a fascinating topic for further research, as I have mentioned in the introduction, my work is to analyse the collections of things oriental and their showcasing throughout the centuries. Thus, although Chinese silk is possibly one, if not, the most representative object representing the Orient, and it almost seemed mandatory to mention it here at the beginning, the fact that it was chiefly used for personal use, rather than as a collection object, makes it quite different from other kinds of *Orientalia*, such as lacquer or porcelain.

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[12] Impey and MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museum*, 259-60.

[13] Whitehouse, "Chinese Porcelain in Medieval Europe," 63-4.

[14] Honour. *Chinoiserie,* 30-1.

[15] It is worth of mention that, differently from porcelain or lacquer, from 6th century onwards silk was not anymore an exclusive product of China, since the Byzantine Empire, later followed by cities such as Lucca or Venice, would start their own production. On the topic, see Morena, *Chinoiserie*, 25-6.

Hence, the rest of the work is mostly focussed on *Orientalia* that were collected and exhibited, rather than usually employed for clothing such as in the case of silk.

1.1 *Orientalia* in Premodern Europe

2. The Katzenelnbogen Bowl

A relevant discovery, and a possible hint to a reprise in the trading patterns is a finding that took place in the Castle of Lucera (Apulia) in 1964-5. The finding was identified as dating back to the second half of the 13th century and includes a bulk of different foreign objects, such as fragments of enamelled glass, an ostrich eggshell and shards from three different porcelain objects, identified as: a rim fragment of a *Yue*-ware bowl, two fragments of a celadon-ware vessel and part of a small *qingbai* bowl.[16] Considering the absence of other fragments in the site that would allow the archaeologists to restore the wares in their integrity, and that these had been found with other objects in a similar fragmentary state, what can be concluded is that these were either acquired already in the form of shards, or that the acquired, intact pieces had been deliberately reduced in such state. Bearing in mind the extremely high prices for the import of porcelain, and the fact that the import was usually mediated by North African and Western Asian merchants, the reason behind this phenomenon might also be coming from the Arabic world. It is in fact known that back then porcelain was believed to have magical properties that could be beneficial for the body, when reduced into powder. It is therefore possible to consider that such belief had been 'imported' together with the porcelain pieces themselves, as it was suggested.[17]

3. the *Gaignières-Fonthill* vase

4. Water-colour drawing of the *Gaignières-Fonthill* vase

The attribution of magical medical properties did not exclusively apply to porcelain, but it was apparently extended to all sorts of uncommon objects, alien to European culture, such as bezoar stones or rhino's horns.[18] However, the attribution of these properties to *Orientalia*, and more specifically to porcelain, would last for long, up until the Early-

ese Porcelain in Medieval Europe," 67-8.

[17] Ibid., 65; See also: Kerr, "Chinese Porcelain in Early European Collections," 46-7.

[18] Stark, "Mounted Bezoar Stones, Seychelles Nuts, and Rhinoceros Horns," 69-70.

Modern period and was one of the main reasons for its popularity and even for the attempts at imitating it.[19] Yet another peculiarity of the treatment undergone by *Orientalia* when in Europe ever since the Middle Age, that most of these objects would share was the fact that some of them were framed with metal mountings when in Europe. Although mounting practices would receive a boost during the Early-Modern period, to which most of the pieces extant nowadays date back (also due to a more substantial availability on the porcelain market), pieces undergoing mounting practices were already present during the Late Middle Age and Renaissance. An example of mounting practices is witnessed, amongst many others, by pieces such as the Katzenelnbogen bowl (**fig. 2**) or the Gaignières-Fonthill vase (**fig. 3-5**).[20]

5. William Beckford's collection

It is not yet entirely clear why this practice took place, but it has been suggested that it was related to the high value these pieces were attributed due to their alleged magical properties.[21] In the late Middle Age, when medical practices were still not very much developed, the attribution of magical (chiefly medical) properties to these objects, would increase their market value, then further boosted by the presence of a mounting in precious metals.

Therefore, the high economic value attributed to such goods might have played a role in choosing a way to properly display them, resulting in having these set within a metal (mostly silver) mounting and resulting the object to stand out more, making them more recognizable by the viewer. On the other hand, instead, it is known that in later centuries, in areas where porcelain was given less value in comparison to noble metals, such as in Spain, practices of metal mountings were meant to increase its value.[22] The logics behind these choices have been discussed by the scholar Anna Grasskamp in her book *Objects in Frames. Displaying Foreign Collectibles in Early Modern China* (2019)

[19] Weststeijn, "Cultural reflections on porcelain in the 17th-century Netherlands," 229-30.
[20] The Gaignières-Fonthill vase is now deprived of the mounting, although it is possible to see this thanks to two drawings: the first **(fig.4)** allows us to see its aspect when it was depicted in 1713 in France. The second **(fig.5)** shows the vase depicted in William Beckford's collection in 1823.
[21] Whitehouse, "Chinese Porcelain in Medieval Europe," 63-4.
[22] Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames*, 30.

where she critically discusses, in a comparative perspective, the processes undergone by foreign collectibles in Early-Modern Europe and China and their social implications.

6. Nautilus Cup, 1602, Utrecht

However, for the scope of this work, I focus on what she theorizes on mounting practices taking place in Europe. She has highlighted how the act of providing ceramics with mountings – often bearing inscriptions of social value – not only enhanced the value of the single pieces, but affects porcelain pieces on several levels, with the result of 'Europeanizing' it.[23] First, in regards with the social aspects of the mountings, their relevance is easily confirmed by the nature of the inscriptions on those pieces: on the drawing of the Gaignières-Fonthill, for example, vase it is possible to recognize the emblems of the house of Anjou-Sicily: the piece was probably gifted by Louis I of Hungary (1257-1323) to someone belonging to that dynasty.[24] The presence of this kind of inscription is not only relevant to understand the cultural biography of the object, as stressed upon by Grasskamp, but also to understand value of 'inalienable possession' attributed to these kind of gifts and expressed by the presence of these familiar emblems.[25] Furthermore, she argues, the way metal mountings affect the pieces is not only aesthetic but also haptic.[26] In fact, by altering the way these objects can be handled – working as *parerga* (a term used to denote marginal decorations) – the *experience* of the object itself is altered (in a sense it is amplified, due to the contrast between the two materials, porcelain and metals, she suggests) but certainly not discouraged. Instead, by equalizing the experience of porcelain to that of other mounted materials commonly found in Wunderkammers such as rare *naturalia* like coconut shells, nautilus shells (**fig. 6**) or precious stones which were also

[23] Ibid., 26.
[24] Lane, "The Gaignières-Fonthill Vase", 132.
[25] Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames*, 29.
[26] Ibid., 30.

often mounted in metal or other European silverware. Hence, she concludes, such mounting practices had the effect of 'Europeanizing' Chinese porcelain from an aesthetic and haptic point of view.[27] Her analysis certainly proposes a challenging view on the role played by mountings on porcelain within the setting of Wunderkammers, employing the comparison in treatment given to other kinds of objects.

Nevertheless, I believe the conclusions she draws could be further extended and rediscussed by examining the role played by *Orientalia* in the setting of Oriental-style Rooms, chiefly for two reasons. Primarily, I believe that practices of metal mounting of *Orientalia* can and must also be observed as a symbolic device, namely as a way for Europeans to enchain and subjugate objects which were recognised as foreign. Such an act of subjugation is not to be meant as neutralizing something that was perceived as potentially noxious or harmful, but simply as foreign and therefore mysterious. What I suggest here is not to be interpreted as an oyster enveloping a grain of sand - a foreign agent perceived as harmful - in mother-of-pearl up until a pearl is created, defusing a process that would harm the tissues of the oyster. It would indeed be quite the opposite: these objects – whose properties and origins were still shrouded in mystery (and so they would remain until the 18th century), were deliberately brought to European courts and, after all, much of their desirability resided in the mysteries and rarity of these materials.[28] Mounting practices would instead act as a way for these objects to be further 'tamed', not exclusively from an aesthetic, social, and functional perspective as suggested by Grasskamp, but also from a symbolic point of view.

It is worth keeping in mind that, in parallel with their role as prized possession of aristocrats (with an exclusive male ownership before modernity), *Orientalia* were also objects of study within Cabinets of Curiosities (in this period chiefly owned by noblemen, slightly later also by scholars – although the two things are often overlapped during this period) together with other aforementioned examples of *naturalia* or *artificialia* and such a process would devoid them of their original function and result into their neutralization. Secondly, and here I refer again to collections of *Orientalia* kept in enclosed spaces such as treasure rooms or *studioli*, by storing and displaying objects that way these were kept isolated from the rest of the space. Whereas on the one hand it is evident that these collections of expensive objects were stored for security reasons, in a way, and this will appear more evident in the following sections, such isolation could be also seen as a form

[27] Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames*, 51.
[28] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 54.

of 'symbolic confinement,' through which their foreign nature is unable to be in touch with other, more familiar objects and 'contaminate' them. Hence, to reconnect to one of the main themes of this work, that of familiarity and foreignness, what could be said is that, although the general attitude in Western Europe would be to acquire these precious pieces, have them mounted in metal to witness their possession and yet keep them in spaces secluded from the rest of the buildings (together with other collected objects). Hence, at once Westerners were highlighting the role of *Orientalia* as prized family heirlooms but also study objects. This would however change in the Early-Modern Period, as I proceed to illustrate, and chiefly in some parts of Europe.

1.2 *Orientalia* in the Early-Modern Period

The conditions for collecting porcelain and other *Orientalia* began to change at the start of the 16th century when the rising Kingdom of Portugal would manage to establish steady trading routes to East Asia, which would in turn allow Lisbon to become the hub for porcelain trade to all Western Europe, thus substituting the Italian cities in their role of main suppliers, and to avoid the necessity of having to deal with the Arabic countries.[29] Following this event, Chinese porcelain would become relatively more common, and thus reasonably cheaper on European markets, to the point that it stopped being only an object for exhibiting, and sets of 'less extravagant' porcelains would start being used as dishes during banquets, at least at the Medici court, although it is probably impossible to pinpoint a moment when such a shift took place, if it did, in other European courts as well, therefore being a rather inhomogeneous transformation.[30]

However, the direct connection established between Portugal and China (through the port cities of Guangzhou and Xiamen, from 1513) did not correspond to Chinese porcelain becoming a common object, also because Spaniards and Portuguese

[29] Impey, *Chinoiserie,* 45. See also: Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer,* 24.
[30] Spallanzani, *Ceramiche alla Corte dei Medici nel Cinquecento* ,125.

7. Andrea Mantegna, *The Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1495-1505

were not interested in flooding the European market with porcelain as it would later be with the Dutch.[31] However, the growing quantity of porcelain reaching the West would allow it to also enter European visual culture at large, as witnessed by the painting by the Italian painter Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) who depicts one of the Magi in its *Adoration* (**fig. 7**) offering Jesus his gift in what can be recognized as a piece of *qingbai* (white and blue) porcelain.[32] Later examples in Italian paintings would seem to further confirm this tendency, which sees porcelain as always associated either to something rich (as a gift given by one of the Magi to Jesus, for example) or as an attribute of gods, such as in Bellini and Titian's painting, *The Feast of the Gods* (**fig.8**), where a goddess is depicted holding a *qingbai* bowl in her hands. Goods coming from across Asia would include all sorts of objects which were not found in Europe, such as gemstones, textiles, and spices, and these were all available in Lisbon for sale.[33]

8. Giovanni Bellini and Titian, *The Feast of the Gods*, c. 1514-1529

The shops of Lisbon were of relevant importance for providing all these types of objects not only to the domestic market and to the royal court of Portugal, but also to other merchants reaching Lisbon from other parts of Europe. In parallel with this, the growing number of goods coming from Asia also allowed such *Orientalia* to enter the collections of scholars, which had started to emerge in Western Europe during the Late Renaissance and would become collectively termed Wunderkammer. These Cabinets of Curiosities included and often exhibited to the public distinct kinds of objects, belonging to the aforementioned categorization amongst which the most famous "labels" are those of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. Nonetheless, amongst the categories it is also possible to find witness of the employment of the term *rerum orientalium* ("things Oriental") by the Dutch physician and scholar Bernardus Paludanus

[31] Van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the interior," 190.
[32] Honour, *Chinoiserie*, 246.
[33] Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 11-2.

(1550-1633).[34] Such a term is vague, and it was mostly used to pinpoint goods coming from the East but on the other hand, from our perspective, it is noteworthy since it remarks a homogeneous pattern in that geographic vagueness attributed to goods coming from territories that were still chiefly uncharted (or unknown, even) by Europeans, as it used to be for the Romans in the 1st century.[35]

9. Medici Porcelain Flask, c. 1575-1587

However, in parallel with the setting up of collections of genuine oriental pieces (regardless of their precise geographic provenience) another point that deserves to be highlighted is that, during the late 16th century, the first attempts at recreating and imitating porcelain in Europe would take place. The excessive cost of import would prompt attempts at locally producing porcelain. The earliest example, in this sense, are the experiments made at the court of the Medici in Florence during the years 1575-1587, founded by Cosimo I Medici (1519-1574) and successively managed by his son Francesco (1541-1587). The workshop did effectively manage to produce soft-paste porcelain (differently from Chinese traditionally hard-paste porcelain) and some of the pieces produced are still visible nowadays (**fig. 9**), although the collections housed in Florence have been dispersed throughout the years. Such workshop was however tightly bounded to the life of his sponsor, Francesco de' Medici, and would fail following his death.[36] Nevertheless, this workshop proved historically important since it was one of the first attempts to reproduce ceramics with the features of porcelain. Such production was flanked by the private collection of genuine Chinese porcelain of the Medici, amongst the most relevant in Europe at the end of the Renaissance, to the point that these would actively be used as crockery for the meals of the Medici family members.[37]

[34] Such a term is reported, for example, in a letter written by the Paludanus to the Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) and reported by Swan, *Rarities of These Lands,* 98.
[35] Vd. supra, 14-5.
[36] Morena, *Chinoiserie*, 34-8.
[37] Spallanzani, *Ceramiche alla Corte dei Medici nel Cinquecento*, 122-3.

Another actor interested in playing an active role in the traffic of porcelain and other goods coming from Asia was the Spanish Empire, that during the 16th century was at its height.[38] Under the rule of Philip II of Spain (1527-1598) the porcelain traffic from China to Western Europe would keep on growing also due to the personal passion the king had for porcelain, to the point that he would personally commission, amongst other porcelain pieces, a set of blue-and-white flasks directly to the kilns of Jingdezhen in Southern China (**fig. 10**).[39] Practices of direct commission of porcelain had already taken place, although on a smaller scale, on behalf of one the predecessors of Philip II on the throne of Portugal, John III (r. 1521-57).[40] Thanks to the possibilities offered by the then recently established unmediated trade with China, it was then possible to commission pieces which would follow more the European taste, rather than having to be satisfied with the leftovers of the domestic market. Similarly to what had taken place in Florence, he also funded (unsuccessful) experiments that were aimed at reproducing porcelain.

10. Philip II's Flask, 16th century

What emerges from the wide scenario I have tried to sketch in a concise yet meaningful way in this chapter is that, thanks to the gradual increase in terms of trading possibilities, porcelain would gradually acquire an important symbolic role in European culture and soon become part of its visual imagery, as witnessed by its appearance in several paintings of the period. The relevance acquired by Chinese porcelain up until the 16th century is further confirmed by the diverse attempts at imitating porcelain and by mounting practices, which can also be seen, as Grasskamp suggests, as a way to Europeanize them.[41] Finally, as I have highlighted at the very beginning of the chapter, due to its mysterious nature porcelain was associated with a number of beliefs surrounding its making and its alleged magical properties. Such a phenomenon of attribution is somehow comparable to the one I have illustrated at the beginning of this section on the origins of silk for the Romans. What

[38] Canepa, "The Iberian royal courts of Lisbon and Madrid, and their role in spreading a taste for Chinese porcelain in 16th-century Europe", 18.
[39] Finlay, *The Pilgrim* Art, 4-5. On the personal collection of Philip II, see Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 14-5.
[40] Ibid., 5.
[41] Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames*, 50-1.

emerges is that the gaps in the European knowledge of such materials were filled with what forms of knowledge that would now be recognized as misleading, as lies and superstition. Yet, back then, the overall aura of mystery surrounding these objects would seem to have been shared with the geographic provenience of these pieces. In general, it is possible to observe how, during the Late Middle Age and the Renaissance such objects (and porcelain, chiefly) were so rare and mysterious they would almost exclusively be part of noblemen's collections and they would often be mounted in metals. However, the evolution in trading routes would allow more porcelain to arrive on the European markets. In some cases, this allowed considerable collections of porcelain and other *Orientalia* to be accumulated, especially in Southern Europe (at the Medici Court, or in Lisbon, and Madrid). In parallel with the birth of these collections of genuine Chinese porcelain, we also see the rise of workshops aiming at reproducing porcelain *in loco* and export porcelain. Whereas in a first moment the collected pieces were emptied of their function by becoming study objects and, as I have suggested above, underwent some sort of 'symbolic isolation/neutralization,' at the beginning of the Early-Modern Period these would start being actively used as crockery, such as at the Medici Court. This was probably made possible by the greater amount of porcelain available on the markets, which made it not that much of a rarity anymore, at least for the top layers of the population.

Things would however change considerably again when the trade of *Orientalia* was taken over by the Netherlands. In the following chapter I examine the role *Orientalia* were given in 17th century Netherlands, and I pinpoint the reasons underlying such a shift in the practices of collecting, before moving further and have a closer look at the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room.

Chapter 2. The *Orient* in a Room

In the first chapter I have discussed the evolution in the practices of collecting *Orientalia* throughout the centuries especially in terms of trading patterns and market tendencies. In this second chapter, instead, I first analyse the collecting and displaying practices of porcelain and *Orientalia* in Early-Modern Netherlands that readers will probably find helpful as a foundation to understand the conception of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room which I analyse later in the chapter. The main research question of this section is: what were the main features of collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* in the Early-Modern Netherlands, and how did they change over time?

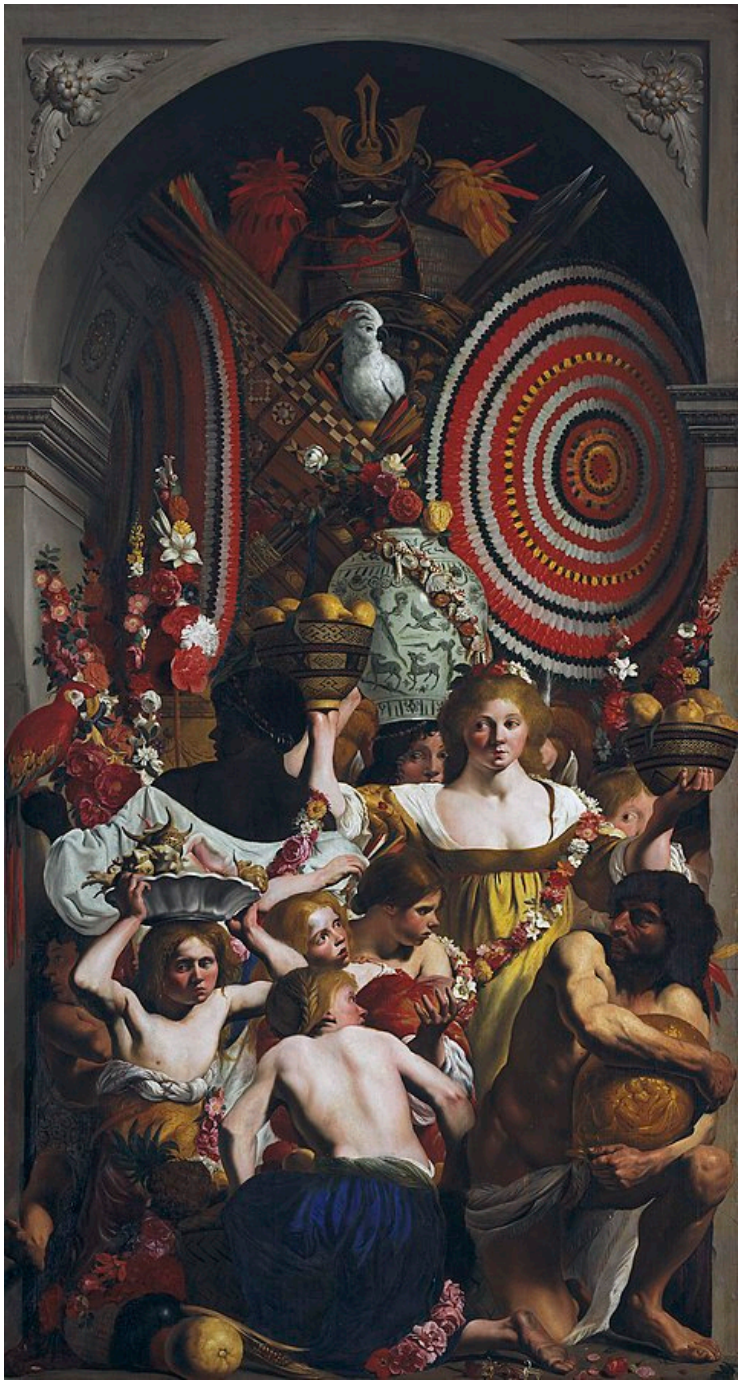
2.1 *Orientalia* in the Early-Modern Netherlands

As I have illustrated in the previous chapter during the 16th century, although the culture and the crave for porcelain and other oriental goods was shared more or less homogeneously across the whole of Europe, most of the trades were controlled by Spain and Portugal (which were dynastically united from 1580 to 1640). The rise of the British EIC (established in 1600) and, to a more remarkable degree, of the Dutch VOC (founded in 1602), would considerably affect the way *Orientalia* were traded.

As illustrated in the painting by Jacob van Campen (**fig.11**), dating to the mid-17th century, the Netherlands (corresponding to what back then was known as the Dutch Republic, 1581-1795) would acquire a primary role in the trade and accumulation of objects coming from all over the globe. Amsterdam would become the main commercial hub for these trades, quicky overshadowing Lisbon.[42] The wealth of goods depicted in the painting is representative of the abundance of all the trades converging to Amsterdam and to the Dutch Republic at large thanks to the VOC.[43] In the painting we can observe objects coming from trades in the Atlantic area, like the feathered parasols from Brazil, but also several recalling the trades with East Asia, like the samurai armour on top and the *qingbai* vase in the centre of the canvas.

[42] Impey and MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums,* 265.
[43] Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 298-301.

It is worth keeping in mind that back then the competition amongst European cities and states to gain prominence in global trade was also intertwined with religious fights between Protestants and Catholics. [44] Such a conflict was particularly sharp and widely perceived in the Netherlands since, back then, those territories (the Seventeen Provinces) were under the rule of Philip II of Spain, a fervent catholic. The trading competition over the goods coming from East Asia, which were a major source of income for the Dutch merchants who were acting as middlemen between Northern and Southern Europe, became one of the main reasons for frictions.[45] The establishment of the VOC helped the Netherlands in competing over the monopoly of *Orientalia*, not only those coming from China but also from Japan, with which the Netherlands had entered in contact in 1600 already.



11. Jacob van Campen, *Triumphal Procession with Gifts from East and West* (detail), 1650-1.

Due to the links between the Iberians and the attempts at evangelizing the country by several catholic orders instead, both Spain and Portugal had been banned from trading with Japan, favouring the ascent of the Netherlands (the only country authorized to trade with Japan from 1641). At the same time, the Dutch had managed to strengthen their presence in the rest of the Pacific area by establishing trading outposts on the island of Formosa (nowadays Taiwan) and, from their

[44] Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches,* 86-7.
[45] Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer,* 38-9.

base in Batavia (present day Jakarta) they had managed to disturb the Portuguese traffic.[46] Although there never was a direct trade between the Netherlands and China in the 17th century, due to the Chinese emperor forbidding it, the number of porcelain and other goods reaching Europe from China is remarkable, and most of it came from the hijacking of either Chinese or Portuguese ships.[47] The hijacked boats, named *carracas* in Portuguese, would provide the name for a specific type of porcelain that would enter the European markets through Dutch trade: *Kraak*.[48] This kind of operations would allow the Netherlands and also England to gain mercantile prominence and dominate the traffic of Chinese porcelain but also other Oriental goods during the whole 17th century.[49]

12. De Metaale Pot (att.), Dish with imitations of Asian characters, c.1670-1680

During the first half of the 17th century, production of imitation porcelain would also start in the Netherlands: the so-called *Hollants porceleyn*, a convincing emulation of Chinese *qingbai* ware employing a combination of transparent lead glaze and decorations painted on tin glaze, although being simple earthenware (**fig. 12, 13**).[50] The first samples of this production date back to 1619 in the Amsterdam and Utrecht areas, although at a slightly later stage the production would move to the town of Delft, hence being chiefly termed Delftware.[51] The local production of Delftware also contributed, as argued by the American scholar Dawn Odell, to

13. Willem Jansz. Verstraten, Dish with an emblem of a Dutch household, c.1645-1650

[46] Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer,* 41-3.
[47] Corrigan, van Campen and Diercks, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam*, 24.
[48] Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art*, 253-4.
[49] Van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese Porcelain in the Interior," 197-200. On hijacked boat on behalf of the Dutch and English trading companies, see also McNeil and Riello, 90-91.
[50] Corrigan, van Campen and Diercks, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam*, 248.
[51] Ibid., 247-250.

the domestication of Chinese porcelain, in the sense of turned into "conventional" objects.[52] Different practices of domestication, such as this or the one hypothesized by Anna Grasskamp mentioned earlier, are given space in the third chapter of this work. Possessions of *Orientalia* and of Chinese porcelain and lacquers would become a rather widespread phenomenon in 17th century Netherlands, and the presence of coarser varieties of Chinese porcelain, along with other kind of *Orientalia*, is also witnessed in lower strata of the Dutch society. The presence of *Orientalia* (and their imitation) in several strata of the Dutch society is representative of the shift taking place there. In the Netherlands, *Orientalia* were not a prerogative of the aristocracy or the richest merchants anymore, quite differently from the rest of Europe.[53] This emerges in several products of visual culture, amongst which the portrait above, which is very meaningful to understand the popularity of porcelain in the Early-Modern Dutch society.

14. Anonymous, "Interior with a Family Receiving Visitors", c.1630

The family depicted in the painting (**fig.14**), in fact, does not look particularly wealthy, yet they have a rather abundant collection of porcelain dishes all lined up on the top shelf of wooden wall panelling. This marks a relevant shift, for example, if compared with porcelain in Italian visual culture of the 15th and 16th centuries: whereas there porcelain was only represented in relationship with either Christian and Pagan deities, in Dutch culture porcelain is way more common and more easily acquirable it was not a prerogative of deities anymore. The reasons behind such an unprecedented diffusion of porcelain pieces amongst the middle classes was made possible by the greater quantity of

[52] Odell, "Delftware and the Domestication of Chinese Porcelain, 177.
[53] Corrigan, van Campen and Diercks, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam*, 146.

pieces available on the Dutch market (with its prices consequently decreasing) and a desire for emulation of the upper classes to show their newly acquired wealth.[54]

Such volume of trades would allow considerably bigger collections of *Orientalia* (again, chiefly Chinese porcelain) to be formed, with the creation of new spaces dedicated exclusively to their showcase. The earliest example of such a space is allegedly recognized as the (now lost) lacquer room set up for Amalia van Solms-Braunfels, wife of the Stadholder Frederick Henry (1584-1647) for their residence in the Huis ten Bosch, in the outskirts of the Hague.[55] It is known that Amalia van Solms had already established a room with porcelain pieces used as decorative elements in the 1630s and, at the same time, that other noblewomen in other countries had started amassing porcelain pieces and create their own collections, as highlighted by the scholarship on the topic.[56] Hence, it is rather safe to say that it is at the beginning of the century that porcelain would become an almost exclusive, with some exceptions, female matter, with the set-up of the first exclusively female collections and a consequent association between gender and porcelain or other decorative elements such as Japanese lacquer, but these subjects are further discussed in the following chapters.

Other rooms of this kind assembled during the 17th century would mushroom across Europe, owned by both men and women with different purposes: whereas for example Fredrick III of Denmark (1609-1670) would have a room in the Rosenborg Palace converted into an "Indian lacquer cabinet" as a private audience chamber, to host ambassadors for example, other rooms were for female usership, such as Eleanora of Bourbon's (1587-1619) room in Breda, and several other examples in Northern Europe.[57] Several authors, amongst which the American historian Suzanne L. Marchand and the German art historian Cordula Bischoff, have however highlighted the fundamental role Dutch society, and its royal family in particular, had in the spread of the culture of porcelain and of these rooms across Europe, and in fact, it known that almost each heir of the House of Orange would establish her own porcelain room when married.[58] This transformation would be corroborated by the fact that is during this period that *Orientalia* would start to be moved out of Wunderkammers and gain their own, independent spaces

[54] Canepa. *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer,* 209. See also van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese Porcelain in the Interior," 196.
[55] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet", 171.
[56] Ibid., 171. See also: Beranek, "Strategies of Display in the Galleries of Amalia van Solms," 1-3.
[57] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 173. See also van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese Porcelain in the Interior," 196.
[58] Marchand, *Porcelain,* 16. It is no wonder that, during this period, Oriental-style Rooms would often end up being termed "Dutch Rooms".

in several forms and depending on the pieces available and the taste of the commissioner, Bischoff argues.[59] Hence, the 17th century would mark the beginning of the process that sees genuine *Orientalia* (or their imitations crafted in Europe), whose number had grown considerably in Northern Europe, thanks to the increased quantity and availability and in spite of the Ming crisis to be given their own spaces and develop autonomously, partly departing from Wunderkammers yet representing a meaningful development, since the two things would keep coexisting.[60] It is impossible to precisely pinpoint when such a shift took place, also because some of these Oriental-style Rooms have seen their collections of *Orientalia* dismantled and displaced (this is also the case of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, as I explain later) or have entirely gone lost. Yet, their birth is also meaningful to observe the artistic developments for the display of such collections but also to understand the evolution in the relationship between East and West and, last but not least, the socio-anthropological importance of collections of *Orientalia* for the European society of the 17th century.

Amalia van Solms' room in Huis ten Bosch, close to the Hague, although now lost, was probably used to contain her whole (and vast) collection of porcelain, which is estimated to be around 398 pieces.[61] However, what makes the room a real turning point for the taste of the period is that sometime around 1654 she had her lacquered screens cut and assembled to fit the walls, together with other Japanese lacquered pieces that were probably used in combination with the porcelain collection. Unfortunately, it is unknown whether the porcelain collection was actually stored there, however this would be confirmed by the fact that all the successive examples of these rooms (largely inspired by Amalia van Solms' room) would contain a combination of lacquered and porcelain elements.[62] Another remarkable point is the fact that, allegedly, presented a uniform Asian style in the coverings and the furnishing, quite differently from the Lacquer Room, which I now proceed to illustrate.

[59] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 172.
[60] Vd. supra, 24.
[61] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 173.
[62] Ibid., 173.

2.2 The Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room

15. the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room (detail)

Although nowadays the room is situated on the ground floor of the Rijksmuseum, its original location was, as I have mentioned earlier, the Stadholder's palace in Leeuwarden, Friesland. It is worth keeping in mind that nowadays, the room is not as it used to look like, and this has been the subject of several discussions.[63] The relocation of the room took place in 1880 and it was organized by the Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers (1827-1921) and the art historian Victor de Stuers (1843-1916). They had made a plea to the Provincial State of Friesland in order to encourage them at best preserving the Room. It was therefore decided to bodily dismantle it and set it up back again in the new building of the

[63] De Haan, "The Leeuwarden Lacquer room: A Royal Puzzle," 154-5. See also: Dorscheid, van Duin, and van Keulen, "The Late 17th Century Lacquer Room from the Palace of the Stadtholder in Leeuwarden," 255. In the edited chapter, the room is explicitly mentioned as having been restored to the aspect it had from 1808 to 1880.

Rijksmuseum, which would then open in 1885. The materials transported to Amsterdam would include, along with the lacquered panels, a dado of carved golden wood and the painted ceiling of the room, measuring 505x280 cm, and finally segments of a decorated wooden cornice.[64] It is however necessary to keep in mind that the room underwent several changes already while in the Stadholder's Palace in Leeuwarden. Originally, as argued in the reconstruction proposed by Johan de Haan and published in 2009, the Room was divided in two adjacent closets, located on the ground floor of the Palace.[65] Also, these spaces have been used by several female members of the family, each one leaving one or more marks of their passage.[66]

16. the left wall of the room

Regarding the issue of the ownership and usership of the Room, several theories have been pushed forward by different scholars, also depending on the fact that the architectural setting of the room has been changed several times. For a long time the main user of the Room was recognized as Henriette Amalia of Anhalt-Dessau (1666-1726), wife of the Frisian Stadtholder Henry Casimir II of Nassau-Dietz (1657-1696). The fact that the monogram of the couple appears on the painted ceiling would seem to foster the

[64] De Haan, "The Leeuwarden Lacquer room: A Royal Puzzle,"155.
[65] Ibid., 154-5.
[66] For an extensive reconstruction of the history of the Room in the Leeuwarden Palace, please refer to the article by De Haan (2009).

attribution of the ownership of the Room to Henriette Amalia. Nevertheless, to date, the Rijksmuseum's website reports the Room as being part of the apartment of Albertine Agnes of Orange-Nassau.[67]

Since 2014, when the Rijksmuseum was opened to the public again after the long restoration processes, its Lacquer Room is once again on view. The porcelain vases showcased are not the original ones (which were probably sold after the revolution of 1795) but belong to the same style and period, in order to convey the original atmosphere to the best possible extent.[68]

17. the right wall of the room

Unfortunately, it is not possible to enter the room and freely wander around it since it is rather narrow, but it is possible to stop slightly over the threshold to admire it. Visitors are welcomed by the view of the Coromandel lacquer screens which, at some point before 1695, the Stadholder must have decided to have split and hung onto the walls. These lacquered screens were very popular in 17th century Netherlands, as it is known that they

[67]Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, "Lacquer room, anonymous, before 1695." Last access 20/06/2021.
[68] Personal communication.

were used already by Amalia van Solms in her room.[69] The name they were known by, however, might be deceiving: Coromandel is in fact the place, on the Southern coast of India, where these lacquered panels were stockpiled before being traded to Europe by the VOC, but they are actually examples of *kuancai* lacquer, produced in China. [70] It is known that the Stadholder wife, now acknowledged as the Princess Albertine Agnes of Orange-Nassau (1634-1696), daughter of Amalia van Solms, used to have two twelve-leafed folding screens which were then used for the room and reassembled therein. [71] Differently from Amalia van Solms' room, which is reported as having been extensively covered in either genuinely Asian or Asian-looking objects, the room presents an interesting result where Asian objects are immersed into a European setting.[72]

18. The central wall of the room

The two screens represent different scenes: on the longer side, to the left of the entrance (**fig.16**), the screen features the scene called "Spring Morning in the Han Palace", a traditional Chinese tale – although the Frisian stadtholders were probably not aware of it. The screen on the right wall (**fig.17**)– which is shorter and required the screen to be cut to size in order to fit it – depicts various views of the famous West Lake in Hangzhou.

[69] Van Campen, "Reduced to a heap of monstrous shivers and splinters. Some notes on Coromandel Lacquer in Europe in the 17th and 18th Centuries," 137.
[70] Ibid., 137.
[71] Dorscheid, Van Duin and Van Keulen, "The Late 17th Century Lacquer Room from the Palace of the Stadtholder in Leeuwarden", 252.
[72] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 172.

What was left of the cutting and pasting process of the right panel was then employed onto the central wall, giving birth to an incongruous yet fascinating pastiche of a mountain scenery, with the edges of the mountains on the different panels' section which do not coincide (**fig.18**).

The ceiling of the room was instead painted on canvas by the Dutch painter Elias van Nijmegen (1667-1775). On a brown-pinkish background, a golden oval encloses a decoration of flowers painted in white and gold stemming from the centre of the ceiling (**fig. 19-20**). Plants in the same style also appear outside of the oval, where they frame a female bust, identifiable with that of Henriette Amalia of Anhalt Dessau (1666-1726), a noblewoman married to Frisian Stadtholder Henry Casimir II of Nassau-Dietz (1657-1696), son of the aforementioned Albertine Agnes of Orange Nassau. Such an identification is supported by the fact that a monogram with the initials of the couple appears in one of the corners of the room.

19. The ceiling - detail

The ceiling and the wooden panels composing the walls are further separated by a wooden cornice. The cornice is made of planks upon which lies a ground of cast gesso with a gold leaf finish, and it shows apples surrounded in cartouches.[73] The wainscoting is also

[73] Dorscheid, Van Duin and Van Keulen, "The Late 17th Century Lacquer Room from the Palace of the Stadtholder in Leeuwarden", 242.

made of gilt wood but instead it features an auricular style strapwork and Baroque acanthus leaves, the same leaves that can be found on the painted ceiling surrounding the female bust.[74] The Room then contains two chairs and two stools, all equipped with red damask seats, and two 17th century-style varnished wooden tables. The intarsia decoration, especially on the table legs, which feature a cherry blossom decorations, openly recalls the Japanese export lacquerware that were traded to the Netherlands in the same period.[75] The decoration on top of the table, instead, recalls more the European strapwork style typical of the Baroque period that appears on the painted ceiling. As we know, imitation lacquerware was also very fashionable back then, to the point that *japanning* (the name given to such a practice) it was even done by women as a hobby, and the Netherlands represented one of the centres of production of all of Europe.[76] Finally, in the left corner at the end of the room, a wooden piece of furniture with shelves is used to showcase part of the remarkable collection of blue and white porcelain that were acquired by the family. The porcelain pieces are also displayed onto the two tables and the whole collection of porcelain exhibited - although it is not the original, as mentioned above - is of a remarkable quality, since it represents all kind of shapes and functions, from small pieces used to serve tea to proper vases, to small Chinese figures exhibited on the wooden ledges in the left corner of the room.

20. The monogram painted onto the ceiling

[74] Ibid., 242.
[75] Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 109-110.
[76] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 115-6.

Although a precise reconstruction of both the changes in ownership, usership and the architectural transformation undergone by the Room with its contents would certainly be helpful, what I believe is the most important and relevant thing to the scope of this work, is the usage reserved to this Room in particular and what it entails. As mentioned by several sources, in fact, the room was employed for its female users to drink tea - a drink that had been imported, once again, from Asia and that was in great fashion during the Early-Modern period. Hence, this kind of spaces are to be understood as performative, and a huge part of such a performance was of course played by its aesthetic setting. In fact, the ensemble of the porcelain vases, the lacquered screens, and even of the pieces produced in Europe with an openly Oriental style - although often combining it with elements that would be recognized as genuinely European, as in the case of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room - gives birth to a space that is radically different from the Wunderkammer of the earlier centuries.

21. Close-up of the table

The possibility of setting up such a space is certainly to be attributed to the extremely higher availability of *Orientalia* on the Dutch market, allowing this kind of rooms to *stem* from Wunderkammers, but also developing distinctive characteristics, from usage, to usership, to meaning. In such a sense, the development of these rooms in the Netherlands would seem to, if not to abandon, at least move away from the usage dedicated to *Orientalia* in Wunderkammers, when they were used only as objects of study. It would rather seem to prosecute like the tradition of the Medici court, when porcelain was actively used as crockery.[77] For example, the active employment of the porcelain pieces as drinking vessels – which would turn the pieces into objects "collected" but not anymore "showcased" as study objects – at least the way these were intended.[78] And it actually went even further than that, since not only the porcelain pieces were used as vessels, but the presence of

[77] Vd. supra, 20.
[78] Faulkner "Imported Ceramics and Japanese Tea Drinking," 70-1.

oriental objects all over the room, rather than just showcased into the room, together with the availability of oriental goods such as tea, that turned these spaces into performative ones.

Nevertheless, I believe that the presence of elements – and here I refer again to the table with slightly Oriental features (**fig. 21**) to be found in the Lacquer Room as a chief example - combining elements of European interior design together with patterns found on imported *Orientalia* (e.g. the cherry blossom pattern on the legs of the table combined with the shapes typical of the auricular style of the 17th century) is worth a closer look. The presence of these pieces of furniture, presenting a decoration that is deliberately hybrid, is certainly to be kept in mind for the understanding of this room in particular but also to be looked for in other, later examples.[79] The Dutch scholar Anne Gerritsen, in her article, *Domesticating Goods from Overseas: Global Material Culture in the Early Modern Netherlands* (2009), discusses the role played by foreign goods within Early-Modern Dutch society and pushes forward the ideas of the American scholar Marsely Kehoe on these goods. Kehoe takes the case of mounted nautilus shells and sees them as objects where the juxtaposition of the foreign (the shell) and the domestic (the mounting) takes place.[80] Gerritsen proposes that "the domestication of exotica within local contexts was crucial for the emergence of what, over the course of the eighteenth century, became a pan-European taste for so-called 'global goods".[81] In turn, I would like to push further away Gerritsen's argument and mention the importance of the active use of these goods in the everyday life of the collectors. Hence, it is the way these objects were employed (i.e. nautilus and porcelain cups being used to drink, textiles worn and so on) rather than just collected and analysed within Cabinets of Curiosities that helped in their domestication. Such a phenomenon, whose origins can be pinpointed in the amount of goods coming from Asia and the rest of the world and the rise of the Dutch middle class, also turned those who would previously be referred to as 'collectors' into 'global consumers' (although one term does not exclude the other).

Furthermore, the deliberately hybrid features of the table – which slightly recalls at one time the features of both the Japanese lacquers of the period and contemporary European furniture – prompts a further reflection for the visuality of these rooms and for

[79] By employing the term 'hybrid' I refer to the set of concepts discussed by the English scholar Peter Burke in his book, *Cultural Hybridity* (2009). Whereas there he enlists and discusses a certain number of terms akin to each other, I have decided to employ the term *hybrid* in tune with Gerritsen's article (2016), where in turn she mentions Kehoe's stance on Nautilus's cups in Early Modern Netherlands.
[80] Kehoe, "The Nautilus Cup Between Foreign and Domestic in the Dutch Golden Age," 276.
[81] Gerritsen, "Domesticating Goods from Overseas," 4-5.

its meaning in the analysis of the relationship between Westerners and *Orientalia*. Although in fact by immersing *Orientalia* in a setting that was professedly reserved for them and presenting them on pieces of furniture which have been "orientalised" (that is, European furniture hybridized with features that would look as Oriental) would entail the idea of smoothening the contrast between the genuinely Asian pieces and the rest of the furniture, which was not available on the Asian market and was crafted in Europe. It is worth keeping in mind that the creators of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room had probably had the chance to visit Amalia van Solms' room in Huis ten Bosch, although they did not have the same availability in *Orientalia* to cover up the whole room as van Solms' room allegedly had been.[82] Hence, differently from the Middle Age and the Late Renaissance, when *Orientalia* were framed in metal mountings to domesticate them through their "Europeanization", here it is the space that aims – at a first glance - at looking as Oriental as possible, although being entirely European. Nevertheless, to the eye of their guests these rooms were the *Orient*, an Orient that, through a composite *mise-en-scène*, made of the presence of the *Orientalia* and their active usage, allowed these spaces to be representative of the idea and image of the Orient Early-Modern people had, its *figment*.

If we look at wider, European frame, the case of the Early-Modern Netherlands looks more like an exception – but it could also be seen as a precursor for the rest of Europe, as argued by Bischoff - especially for what regards the collecting and exhibiting practices, due to the volume in terms of *Orientalia* reaching the country. Nevertheless, the presence of these kind of spaces is not to be associated exclusively with the Low Countries. It is for example meaningful the case of the *Trianon de Porcelaine,* built by Louis XIV (1638-1715) for one of his concubines, Madame de Montespan (1640-1707). Such a building was erected in 1670 and was entirely covered in blue and white faience – produced in the several factories active among Northern France and the Low Countries.[83] The existence of the *Trianon* was very short-lived, since the weather had damaged the surface of the faience tiles and, in 1687 the whole structure was demolished to make room for the *Grand Trianon.*[84] However, the creation of the *Trianon de Porcelaine* would inspire the conception of other spaces in an Oriental-fashion built in later years (chiefly crafted with imitations, as the *Trianon* itself, rather than with genuine *Orientalia*). Several examples of these spaces are found across Europe, such as the Chinese Pavillion in

[82] Vd. supra, 31.
[83] Honour, *Chinoiserie*, 53-6.
[84] Marchand, *Porcelain,* 55.

Drottningholm, Sweden (1760s) or the *Palazzina cinese* (1799) in Palermo.[85] In such a sense, the propagation of these architectures and interiors across Europe during the Modern Period is certainly impressive and demonstrates the pervasiveness of such a fashion across the courts as the trade of *Orientalia* had spread across Western Europe was during the previous centuries.

This kind of buildings, with their monumentality and with a showcase of *Oriental* features that goes beyond the inner space and envelops the outside – although with materials exclusively produced in Europe - are certainly akin to the *Oriental - style Rooms* I focus on here, but different. Whereas in fact the latter are intimate spaces with an extensive usage of genuine *Orientalia* pieces, be it porcelain or lacquerware, mixed with Oriental-looking European furniture. Furthermore, these Oriental-style Rooms were an exclusive female matter and as highlighted by Bischoff, had a political role for the dynasty of Orange, whose women were actively contributing to the diffusion of these rooms across Northern Europe, to the point that these spaces ended up being called "Dutch Rooms".[86] Conversely, these pavilions and palaces surely had inherited from the Wunderkammers the purpose of leaving visitors amazed at its view. Yet, these buildings were chiefly of male usership and ownership and had no precise political purpose other than being a showcase of economic prestige. Nevertheless, both phenomena (Oriental-style Rooms and Oriental Pavilions) represent a meaningful development for the fashion of *Chinoiserie* that finds its architectural origins in the 17th century before further spreading up until the Russian Empire with the Chinese Village built by Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796) for her royal palace in Tsarskoye Selo, close to St. Petersburg. This latter example is however more of an exception, since buildings showcasing oriental features on the outside were almost exclusively a male prerogative, whereas the female domain consisted of more reserved spaces, hidden within the walls.

Throughout this chapter I have surveyed what the culture of *Orientalia* in the Early-Modern Netherlands was, and the setting surrounding the creation of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, along with analysing its visuality. In the following chapter I discuss the more theoretical aspects of the room, starting from the power of the showcased objects in influencing its visitors.

[85] Honour, *Chinoiserie,* 53.
[86] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 171-2.

Chapter 3. Familiar and Foreign

Whereas the first two chapters were chiefly dedicated to the history of *Orientalia* in Europe and then chiefly in the Netherlands, this third chapter is instead committed to a theoretical analysis of the concepts stemming from collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia*. The main research question of this section is: what do the collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* imply, and how are these practices meaningful for a deeper understanding of the Early-Modern Western society at large? The analysis I push forward – as readers will notice - is rather multi-layered and composite, and it is applied onto the concepts following an *upward* direction: therefore dealing first with the collected objects, then to the room as a whole, and then to the owners and their society.

The first concept that I believe of key relevance to inspect these kind of spaces is that of the power of artefacts: as argued by van Eck, Versluys and ter Keurs in their article, "The Biography of Cultures: Style, Objects and Agency" (2015), the artefacts' agency can be framed into three distinct categories. According to their article, the first is the power of an artefact to prompt an emotional reaction into the viewer, the second is that of expressing a culture revival through its historicity and, finally, the third one is the agency of objects to work as the basis for practices of culture criticism, identity formation and cultural innovation.[87] All these three "powers" return to a more or less substantial degree in the analysis I propose here, although I would like to focus on the first and the last, and I intend to start by discussing the third one in relation with these rooms. Albeit, in fact, in their article the authors chiefly refer to this third power of artefacts in the perspective of a revival of past cultures, the remarks they make can also be applied to artefacts perceived as belonging to other cultures, if we refer to what observed by the English scholar Susan M. Pearce. According to her, the dichotomic relationship we (meant as Westerners) established with the Exotic (in this case, the Orient), could somehow be compared to the relationship formed with our own past (expressed in terms of Same: intelligible/Other: unknowable).[88]

Similarly, in their article, the authors identify the importance of the Past and of the Other in the context of culture renewal of our own culture, deriving from a new positioning

[87] Van Eck, Versluys, and ter Keurs, "The biography of cultures: style, objects and agency," 5.
[88] Pearce, *On Collecting*, 310.

towards them.[89] In the article – discussing an artwork by the contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing, namely the sculpture of a Chinese phoenix – the authors remark its power to evoke the presence of Chinese culture in a Western setting, deriving from the strong agency of said artefact. This phenomenon can clearly be related to the collections of *Orientalia* in Early-Modern Europe, since we have to imagine those vases and other objects perceived as foreign (although probably not directly termed "Chinese," due to the widespread conflation of names and terms I have sketched out above) as artefacts that could evoke the presence of the Other. Starting from this idea, we have to imagine the role played by *Orientalia* in Europe ever since the Middle Age and possibly even before. These objects, as I have illustrated this far, were given a high value for a series of reason but, without a doubt, most of their value depended on their rarity, their alleged magical properties and even more on their non-replicability (and this goes especially for porcelain but also for lacquer and, up until the Middle Age, also for silk). Furthermore, the strong association with the Orient these objects were given in Europe would turn them into objects with a specific aura, able to convey the presence of the Orient in a space. The perception of their alienness and alterity could therefore be the main reason underlying the mounting practices as theorized by Anna Grasskamp: the Europeanization – that is, the domestication – of these objects would therefore be implemented through mountings.[90] Indeed, this can be seen as a way to neutralize, or at least tame, the aura of foreignness which was perceived as inherent and embedded into *Orientalia*.

A possible response to this perception of foreignness, to which I have already hinted at in the first chapter, is that of symbolic confinement, that in turn leads to a neutralization of the aura of foreignness. Such a concept, I believe, could be further discussed in relations with the topic of Oriental-style Rooms, although with some adjustments and clarifications deriving from the different context. Primarily, it is necessary to keep in mind that these rooms, although evolving from Wunderkammers, had a completely different usership. This in turn derived from a distinct functions these spaces had in comparison with Cabinets of Curiosities and Wunderkammers. Whereas the latter, as discussed before, had the role of being places for the study of the collected pieces (although much importance was also given to prompting a reaction of awe and wonder in guest visitors), Oriental-style Rooms were exclusively places for leisure.

[89] Van Eck, Versluys and ter Keurs, "The biography of cultures," 5. For a further explanation of the term used by Stephen Greenblatt, see "Resonance and Wonder," 43.
[90] Vd. supra, 18-9.

However, the fact that the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room and most of these spaces that, differently from Wunderkammers which only contained just some *Orientalia* are entirely dedicated to their exhibiting, are still enclosed and remain deeply intimate spaces is rather telling. This is in fact related to their relationship with cabinets – to the point that many of them would still be called with such a term. Nevertheless, this deliberate reclusion and detachment of *Orientalia* into narrow spaces within palaces might as well be seen as a form of symbolic neutralization: by keeping *Orientalia* stored away and allow just a few people to access these spaces, the objects contained were not given the possibility to "enter in contact" with other objects and – as it used to be in the past, represent a nuisance due to their aura of foreignness. The accumulation of *Orientalia* in bigger quantities during the 17th century would therefore call for bigger spaces to display these collections while, at the same time, keeping them away from the rest of the palace and therefore the Western world which was "outside".

On the other hand what could be hypothesized, and I personally lean more towards this, is that instead the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, and these rooms at large, are representative of the shift from the previous period, when *Orientalia* were still perceived as foreign objects that needed some sort of domestication as the one offered by mounting practices. Instead, these rooms would now come to represent the fulfilled domestication of the Orient in Europe and its reproduction: their conception and creation would coincide with a domestication that had already taken place. The haptic experience of porcelain, a concept which, as expressed by Grasskamp in her dissertation, would play a meaningful role in the experience of *Orientalia* during the Middle Age and Late Renaissance, here would seem to change again.[91] Whereas in fact, she argues, such an experience was in the past centuries amplified by the contact with metal and porcelain at the same time – materials that have different characteristics and that transmit different sensations to handlers. In this room visitors are instead exposed to a variety of non-mediated (since the objects are not mounted) haptic experiences, which are not limited to the varieties of porcelain, but also to lacquer. Furthermore, the pieces are not only employed as study objects, but as actual drinking vessels. Hence, the haptic experience is further increased since it is not restricted to hands, but also experienced through mouth contact. However, the domestication of the *Orient* through its artefacts in Early-Modern Netherlands is, I believe, not only related to the birth and usage of these rooms. Instead, I believe, much is owed to the imitation of Chinese porcelain and, to a minor degree, to that of Japanese

[91] Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames*, 30.

lacquerware. As pushed forward by Dawn Odell, the large-scale production of Delftware in 17th century helped in redefining what was first perceived as a foreign good into an emblem of "Dutchness" of the Early-Modern period. [92] The production of ceramics which aesthetically imitated Chinese porcelain and its subsequent export all over Europe and later also to the United States allowed in turn these objects to start to be perceived as a product of Dutchness, especially with the export of painted tiles. Although the recipe for the making of porcelain was still unknown, it was not anymore treated as an object with magical properties, but instead it was described with more "mundane, pragmatic and familiar terms , conveying the production and utility of porcelain in language that made it "at home" in Dutch domestic interiors."[93] Such an acquired familiarity with these objects is further witnessed by the pervasiveness of porcelain in Dutch paintings of the 17th century and by the European wide success of Delftware production, which eased a direct identification of such products with the Netherlands – also in terms of a good typically associated to women.[94]

On the larger European scale, instead, the domestication of the Orient is instead that is to be considered meaningful for the understanding of the process of familiarization of Early-Modern Western society with *Orientalia* is the contemporary spread of Oriental-style palaces and rooms of bigger dimensions in the rest of Europe. Amongst these, the already mentioned *Trianon de Porcelaine* in Versailles, which served as an inspiration for other buildings of this type, or the *Porzellanzimmer* in the Royal Palace of Charlottenburg (**fig. 22**), built at the beginning of the 18th century are meaningful to analyse the evolution of these spaces. In fact, whereas the Oriental-style Rooms usually found in the Netherlands or related to the House of Orange are characterized by being mostly narrow spaces with a female usership, the *Porzellanzimmer* assembled by Frederick I of Prussia (1657-1713) in Charlottenburg is larger than its Dutch equivalents.[95] It was in fact meant to host guests during their visits to the Royal Palace and have them awing at the greatness of the decoration, which included mirrors in order to further amplify the effect of magnificence caused by the abundance of porcelain.[96] A similar discourse can be done for the *Trianon de Porcelaine* which, with its façade covered in colourful imitation of porcelain, was conceived to elicit awe in its viewers. The extensive use of either genuine porcelain or its imitation, in spaces that were either enclosed (like the rooms in the Netherlands or Germany) or in

[92] Odell, "Delftware and the Domestication of Chinese Porcelain," 176-7.
[93] Ibid., 178.
[94] Ibid., 192-3.
[95] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 57.
[96] Ibid., 164.

plain sight, of either male or female usership, demonstrate the fulfilment of Chinese porcelain – be it only in visual (such as in the case of the *Trianon de Porcelaine* – crafted with imitations of Chinese porcelain) or also in material terms. Instead, such a diffusion in the usage of porcelain would seem to represent the natural evolution of what I have written earlier in referral by highlighting the difference between thinking of practices of mounting as comparable to what an oyster does with a grain of sand. Porcelain, and other *Orientalia*, were now considered luxurious and exotic goods which were however completely integrated within the European society of the Early-Modern period, with of course differences in usage and taste depending on the area. The fact that in the Netherlands these spaces would remain intimate and therefore enclosed and reserved to a smaller public is to be associated, I believe, to the strong association women (whose domain in noble palaces was less "public" or "visible" than that men used to have) had with porcelain and interior design.[97]

22. the *Porzellanzimmer* in the Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin

Nevertheless, regardless of whether these rooms and spaces were made out of genuine or imitation porcelain, were they in the Netherlands, France, or some other parts of Western Europe they are tangible materialization of the third power mentioned by van Eck, ter Keurs and Versluys in their article. The style that these rooms helped in spreading across Europe is in turn meaningful to understand the phenomenon of globalization

[97] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 171.

Western Europe was undergoing in the Early-Modern period. However, the authors make a further distinction between the materiality and the style of an object in evoking a culture.[98] Materiality is understood by them as "the agency and meaning of the material itself, an essential factor in its power to create presence".[99] As highlighted in the previous chapters of this work, the materiality of porcelain and lacquer was possibly the quality Europeans appreciated the most and at the same time found the most puzzling about these two materials, with all the different attempts at replicating their qualities I have enlisted here. It is safe to say that these two materials (along with the visuality these artefacts would carry along, of course), would end up representing the Orient in Western Europe, all the way from the Late Middle Age to the Early-Modern period. It is no wonder, in fact, that "china" would soon end up being a term used to address China, whereas "japanning" and "japan," as mentioned above, were used to indicate Japan, similarly to what had taken place during the Roman Empire, when the population crafting silk (identifiable with Chinese) were addressed to as *Seres*, in association with *sericum* (meaning silk-like) .[100]

The style of imitation pieces was even easier to replicate, and it actually allowed Europeans to craft artifacts that were closer to their needs and taste but still being able to "evoke" the presence of the Orient, be it China, or Japan, or someplace else. During the Late Middle Age and even during the Renaissance these artifacts, which were avidly collected, were framed into mountings so to Europeanize them, as Grasskamp has extensively demonstrated, things would change. During the Early-Modern period, the practices of imitation and of extensive collecting have made *Orientalia* familiar enough to the European public so that the Wunderkammers, where these objects used to be stored in, were actually transformed to visually imitate the features of *Orientalia* and become the Oriental-style Rooms. Hence, not just the single artefact is able to "evoke" the Orient, but the style of the whole room, and the materiality of some of the pieces there exhibited would manage to summon such a presence. As such, these rooms as a whole also work according to the third power objects have: once these have absorbed the visual features of the objects they store and exhibit, even though the rooms themselves are chiefly made in Europe and exclusively situated there, they are able to actively evoke the presence of the Orient, to the point that they become spaces where Orient was performed. The spread of these rooms across Europe could be seen as the fulfilment of their power in working in the direction of cultural innovation, since indeed these objects and rooms are catalysts and subsequent

[98] Van Eck, Versluys and ter Keurs, "The biography of cultures," 5.
[99] Ibid., 5.
[100] Rujivacharakul, "China and china," 15. On japanning, see Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 115-6.

symbols for first the Dutch and then the whole European Early-Modern upper (and later also middle) classes.

Going back to the first point enlisted in the article by ter Keurs, van Eck, and Versluys, they argue that the first power held by an artefact is its capacity to elicit an emotional response into the viewer. They propose such a power referring once again to Xu Bing's *Phoenix,* and of course such a reaction can of course be of several different types: awe, fright, dismay, and so forth. For sure, during the Middle Age and at later stages, single *Orientalia* were prompting such reactions into people seeing and touching them for the very first time. Their previously unknown haptic and visual features, along with their unknown origins were certainly the features that fascinated Westerners the most, causing awe (and perhaps even fright, if we want to believe that metal mountings were applied to harness them) in their collectors. It is therefore unsurprising that these objects were amongst the most prized possessions into Wunderkammers, a term that indeed indicates the emotional reactions their visitors were expected to have when dealing with the exhibited objects, a reaction of awe and wonder.

Besides, although the authors write about of single objects, I believe that the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room and, in some cases Oriental-style Rooms at large, can be treated as "single objects," too. There, as I have highlighted before, in fact, the space was remodelled according to the characteristics of the objects exhibited and, on top of that, the space was reserved especially for those objects with those specific features. Although the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room underwent several changes throughout the centuries, as far as we know it was always used to exhibit the collection of *Orientalia* and also perform them, with the result that the collection is inseparable from the space that displays it. Furthermore, the effect these rooms were supposed to have onto visitors, that of wonder, which I know proceed to explore, is primarily conveyed by the room as a whole, not only by the single artefacts.

The sense of wonder is one of the central models for the exhibition of artworks as suggested by the American literary historian Stephen Greenblatt.[101] He does so in reference to modern museum practices. Nevertheless, he states, this mode of exhibiting finds its roots into Late Renaissance and Early-Modern Wunderkammers. Hence, by acknowledging the link between Wunderkammers and Oriental-style Rooms, I argue, we could apply his observations onto these spaces as well. He argues, in fact, that

[101] Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 42-3.

Wunderkammers were at the same time meant for possession and display. According to Greenblatt, in Wunderkammers, the sensation of wonder:

> "…derived not only from what could be seen but from the sense that the shelves and cases were filled with unseen wonders, all the prestigious property of the collector […] Those things were not necessarily admired for their beauty; the marvelous was bound up with the excessive, the surprising, the literally outlandish, the prodigious."[102]

At a first glance, it would indeed seem to be a scenery applicable to Oriental-style Rooms as well: there the abundance of stuff was meant to strike the eye of visitors – probably even more than in the case of Wunderkammers. A second phenomenon he talks about, also in reference to wonder (that would be a subtype of it), is what he terms as the resonance of objects.[103] According to him, such an effect would derive from the capacity of the displayed object to "reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand." It is worth keeping in mind that he is still referring to modern exhibitions, where the objects displayed in a room would be able to have visitors wonder about their origins and how these objects would be then gathered into a single room. Nonetheless, for the reasons I have enlisted this far, chiefly the strong presence of *Orientalia* into Early-Modern visual and material cultures, the *Orientalia* there displayed would indeed *resonate* to the eyes of visitors, strongly signalling their alien (in this case Oriental) origins. Such a concept, as well as the agential power mentioned by van Eck, ter Keurs and Versluys is certainly meaningful to analyse the power of objects in general, and *Orientalia*. Nevertheless, I believe that it is also necessary here to acknowledge the role human agency played in the set-up of these rooms. The owners of these rooms – in the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room as elsewhere - here did not simply amass collections of acquired *Orientalia* so that these could evoke the presence of the Orient. Instead, they would have the whole space decorated in a certain way and according to rules that, for example, the women of the Orange dynasty would contribute to establish.[104] It is therefore with time, and the spread of these rooms across Europe, I argue,

[102] Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 50.
[103] Ibid., 43.
[104] Bischoff, "Women collectors and the rise of the porcelain cabinet," 171.

that a certain Oriental-style was formed and, although *Orientalia* would certainly play a central role in that, much of it was made by the women who were setting up these places and performing them.

23. Frontispiece of Johan Nieuhof's 'The Legation of the Dutch East India Company' (1665)

A final aspect to be discussed to explore the relationship between Early-Modern society, chiefly the Dutch one, and *Orientalia*, is a phenomenon analysed by the American historian Benjamin Schmidt and extensively explained throughout his book, *Inventing Exoticism. Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (2015). This far, I have analysed how the *Orientalia,* which for centuries, along with travel reports have represented the material embodiment of Asia in Europe. However, with the ever-growing development of the sea routes, the relations between Europeans and Asian intensified on a more direct level. Asia (I am deliberately using the geographic term here) was available for study to a broader public and, in fact, a variety of materials, including maps and written sources were then produced on the area. As highlighted by Schmidt, especially from 1670 to 1730, places that were involved in commercial relations "became things – consumable things and luxury items – as exotic geography segued into collecting and the material arts".[105] Such a phenomenon has already been slightly touched upon earlier in this work, when *china* ended up meaning porcelain and ceramics at large, whereas *japanning* was employed to mean (often amateur) practices of Japanese lacquer imitation in Early-Modern Europe.[106] This phenomenon, Schmidt argues, is revealing of the attitude of Early-Modern Europeans, for which collecting and consuming practices were conflated with the aesthetic of exotic geography. From such an attitude, an overlap in the geographic depiction of spaces with the decorative arts of the period would then take place, giving birth to a relevant growth of depictions of the *Orient* on behalf of Europeans, to an extent to what had taken place with

[105] Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 227.
[106] Vd. supra, 39.

Delftware. Whereas the latter was not exclusively concerned with reproductions of Oriental characters, the images circulating in the books mentioned by Schmidt most certainly were. The several frontispieces and maps produced in the Netherlands and circulated.

Amongst these books, one of the most relevant was the one conceived by the Ducth printer Jacob van Meurs (1618-1680), "The Legation of the Dutch East India Company", based upon the sketches and the work of the Dutch explorer Johan Nieuhof (1618-1672) and published in 1664 (**fig. 23**).[107] This book contained a series of sketches drawn by Nieuhof in China that, thanks to their widespread diffusion, possibly boosted the creation of a shared imagery about the places represented. It is almost impossible to assess the degree to which all these media (books, images, maps, as well as genuine *Orientalia* and their imitations, such as Delftware) affected the Dutch and then the European understanding of Asia (as opposed with the *Orient*). Nevertheless, it is worth considering the hypothesis that a series of stereotypes were born into this period due to a common imagery based onto the material coming from Asia and their imitations in Europe, which were elaborating upon the images found on the genuine pieces and adapt it to the local taste, prompting the birth of *Chinoiserie*. Such an artistic fashion, as declared by the English art historian Oliver Impey, is:

> "The European manifestation of mixtures of various oriental styles with which are mixed rococo, baroque, gothick (sic!) or any other European style it was felt was suitable…Chinoiserie starts, of course, by imitation, developing further and further away from its prototypes with time. This is not simple degeneration of motifs into meaningless symbols, but a much more complex process, for new materials for copying were continually being made available."[108]

Such a statement, I believe, perfectly sums up the fashion of *Chinoiserie* from an aesthetic point of view. Nevertheless, what has to be considered is that, more than exotic landscapes, this artistic fashion was also about the representation of oriental characters into European fashion. This perhaps is less evident in the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, since there the transformation of Oriental motifs on behalf of European artists only regarded natural features (i.e. the wooden table in the room), but it becomes more problematic if we were to analyse the contemporary production of Dutch maps and book

[107] Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 45.
[108] Impey, *Chinoiserie,* 10.

frontispieces, as Schmidt did, or later examples of Oriental-style Rooms, such as the Porcelain *Boudoir* in Naples (**fig. 24**).

Whereas the availability of *Orientalia* on the Dutch market of the 17th and 18th centuries had allowed for genuine objects coming from Asia to be displayed, the same could not be said for even slightly later examples of Oriental-style Rooms. There, an even more creative re-enactment of the *Orient* would take place. This would sometimes happen by making the features of the Oriental characters seen on porcelain and lacquer more elongated (and therefore rather grotesque), while some other times monkeys and chimpanzee were depicted in these spaces wearing dresses that were Oriental in appearance. Impey denies the possibility that these depictions had a mocking or racist purpose and dismisses these critiques by arguing that even though *Chinoiserie* was not a correct or realist depiction of the Orient, what mattered to people back then was that those representations were pretty and that, after all, "correctness is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon."[109] Indeed, perhaps, these spaces were not deliberately or declaredly made with a mocking or even racist purpose. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that the circulation of *Orientalia* and all these media based upon them (imitation ceramics, paintings, prints) have played a strong role in somehow giving birth to certain stereotypes.

24. The Porcelain *Boudoir* in Naples

[109] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 14.

Throughout this chapter I have explored how these rooms can be seen as another way for Europeans to appropriate and domesticate *Orientalia*, how these spaces worked on their visitors through their visuality and how visitors would perform these spaces. Furthermore, I have discussed the way relationship between Westerners and *Orientalia* would further change during the Early-Modern period, thanks to the influence of Dutch trade and also by considering the spread of imitations of *Orientalia*. In the following, and last, chapter, I intend to discuss the *consequences* of the spread of these rooms for the European understanding of the Orient. I intend to do this by looking at a concept that, so far, I have slightly touched upon here, that of Orientalism, and, secondly, by exploring the association between Orient and women during the 17th century.

Chapter 4. Exhibiting and Dominating over the *Orient*

In the previous sections of this work I have enlisted and discussed a series of issues stemming from the relationships established between collecting and displaying practices of *Orientalia* and Westerners during the Early-Modern period. I have given particular attention to the shift that took place with the increase in availability of *Orientalia* and highlighted the link between this phenomenon and the birth of Oriental-style Rooms, employing the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room as a chief example. Starting from that, I have analysed the change the spread of these rooms and other media influenced by the imagery of the Orient created that far influenced the conception of the Orient in Early-Modern Europe.

In this last chapter I mean to further explore these concepts and look at the impact these rooms may have had on the Western understanding of the Orient and affected the way Westerners would deal with Asian countries, during the Early-Modern period as much as in more recent periods. I intend to do so by employing two main concepts: that of Orientalism and that of gendered collecting practices. After that, my intention is to sketch out the fundamentals of a framework for the understanding of Oriental-style Rooms at large. The main research question for this last chapter is: to what degree may have exhibiting practices of *Orientalia* contributed to a stereotypical and deformed conception of the Orient?

That of Orientalism is a concept analysed by the eminent Palestinian American scholar Edward W. Said (1935-2003) and extensively surveyed in his book, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, published in 1978, which largely contributed to the birth of the field of Postcolonial studies. His influence on every branch of the Humanities has been enormous, either in agreement or in contrast with what he had argued in the book. His analysis starts from the point that several forms of Orientalism do exist in European culture: the first is "Orientalism" meant as a field of academic study, concerned with the study of the language and culture of those areas of the world which are perceived as Oriental; the second is the "Orient" meant as a way (and a concept) for Europe and the West to define themselves as opposed to it.[110] In particular, he argues, this specific form of Orient is not to be considered as imaginative or abstract. Instead, it is deeply embedded into European material civilization. Partly stemming from these two forms of Orientalism,

[110] Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

the third meaning he attributes to Orientalism is that of "[a] Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[111] According to him, from the 18th century, when the European colonization of Asia was proceeding steadily, Orientalism can be seen as a Western institution created with the purpose of establishing its hegemony over the conquered territories. His whole discourse on power and hegemony heavily draws from Gramsci and Foucault's theories.[112] Of course, these three forms of Orientalism are often intertwined, with the first form of Orientalism devoted to the production of knowledge so to strengthen the third form, the one concerned with power and domination, for example.

As mentioned before, Said's book prompted a series of reactions right after its publication. Most of the critiques have been focussed on the huge conflation Said would make on the Orient, which is proposed as an almost homogeneous entity. Whereas some would accept the general principles relating to the book, in particular the third form of Orientalism proposed by Said, some others would see this book as provocative and diminishing *vis-à-vis* the West and its tradition of Oriental studies. Accepting the theses of this book, chiefly meant to accept forms of internalized racism and cultural superiority towards Oriental cultures inherent within Western societies. Some other scholars, such as the British historian and novelist Robert Irwin (1946-) has instead remarked the importance if not the sacrality of Oriental studies, amongst other points.[113] In the introduction to his book *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalist and Their Enemies* (2006), published a few years after Said's passing, he would harshly criticize the book, and openly states that his work was born in response to Said's. In particular, he would discredit Said's work on the basis of certain historical inaccuracies made by the first, and one in particular: Said would pay too much attention to the British and French colonialism as the main source for Orientalist discourses and forms of knowledge.[114] Instead, Irwin argues, German Oriental studies had an enormous relevance in the study of those territories way before the Anglo-French colonialist wave.[115] The consequences of Said's work are, according to Irwin, that nowadays, being called an "Orientalist" is a pejorative, rather than flattering term.[116] As mentioned in the introduction to his book, his purpose was to critically analyse Said's book in order to dismiss all his arguments on the supposed bad faith of Oriental studies,

[111] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
[112] Ibid., 3.
[113] Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing,* 10-1.
[114] Ibid., 12.
[115] Ibid., 391.
[116] Ibid., 15.

although his attacks often seem more oriented to discredit Said as a person rather than proving his theories wrong.

A third character concerned with a critical response and assessment of Orientalism in terms of scholarship is the Swiss historian Urs App (1949-) who, in 2010, has published another book on the topic, *The Birth of Orientalism*. In the preface to his work, he mentions that both the book by Said, and Irwin's response would start with a similar precondition: both were in fact focussed on the Orient as the Arab world for practical reasons (they were their field of specialization, after all), hence leaving out a significant part of Asia with all its diversity and cultural richness.[117] What he proposes to do in his book is instead to look at the significant production – paying particular attention to the field of religious studies. These in fact were, according to him, one of the main reasons of interest for Europeans studying the Orient, and therefore, what he presents is a conspicuous list of past authors – mostly intellectual and philosophers, such as Voltaire and Diderot – who have dealt with the study of Oriental cultures in the past, along with their research.[118] In comparison with Irwin, App seems less interested in discrediting Said's theories on Orientalism rather than as just focussing on other kind of sources, which would pretty much be contemporary to those Said would refer to. All of these sources do belong to the Age of Enlightenment, hence the 18th century. Just as Said and Irwin, App is forced to limit the scope of his book since making a review of the whole production Europe dedicated to the Orient throughout the centuries is a daunting challenge. Nevertheless, since App's book claims, from its very title, to be about the *birth* of Orientalism, I believe that the employed sources should be at least a bit older.

What clearly emerges from the analysis on the books by these three authors, is that when it comes to the origins of the study of the Orient in Europe they almost exclusively refer to rather recent sources, all of them belonging to the field of literature or intellectual history. I disagree with such a choice for one main reason: I believe that indeed, although Said's ideas on Orientalism can be deemed as true, but these should be applied onto a much broader field to see if they can hold. Such an operation should be "vertical," by looking at older sources, possibly on a wider area than that of the Middle East. In fact, if we were to apply Said's Orientalism as having been employed uniformly on the whole of Asia we would miss a substantial chunk of the Western perspective on it. However, as much as vertical, a possible review of Orientalism should also be "horizontal": it should, if not

[117] App, *The Birth of Orientalism,* xi.
[118] Ibid., xii.

include, at least hint at different fields, such as that of the visual arts which, as I have illustrated this far, has proven incredibly rich during the centuries and represents a strong departure point to explore the relationships between Occident and Orient over the centuries and, most importantly, the role played by the Orient in the Western imagination. A monumental work, aiming at analysing the place held by the Orient in Europe was written by the American historian Donald F. Lach during the 1960s and the 1990s, but it was not concerned with the concepts pushed forward by Said. In a similar fashion, all the volumes I have found on the topic of *Chinoiserie* barely mention any theoretical approach to these issues, being instead focussed on a more descriptive approach to the products of these fashion.

Nevertheless I believe that even the branch of art history concerned with *Chinoserie* would benefit from a more theoretical approach to its products. A short essay that has instead reconnected Said's ideas to the field of the visual is the one written by the British historian of architecture Steven Parissien, for the catalogue of the exhibition *Encounters. The Meeting of Asia and Europe (1500-1800)*, which took place at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 2001. The exhibition aimed at facing with a critical spirit the result of the exchanges that occurred between Asia and Europe in the Early-Modern period. In particular, the exhibition's purpose was to examine how these exchanges impacted the imagery of the Asia and Europe related to each other, also by recognizing Asia as multipolar (hence dividing it into macro areas, such as South Asia, India, China, *etc.*). Parissien's essay is concerned with the issue of the reception of Asian art and the recreation of architectural spaces that – to the mind of Westerners – were supposed to look like the Orient. He does that with a specific focus on England, but his statements could be applied to a degree to the whole of Europe, although his argument contains one main imprecision. He argues, in fact, that the roots of such a phenomenon are recognizable into the Ottoman defeat of 1683, when the Christian powers managed to resist the siege of Vienna.[119] Consequently to this, there was a shared perception of a diminution in the risk presented by the Orient and, "its consequent repackaging as a passive, indolent and benign artistic influence."[120] To put it into the terms of this thesis, it is as if the Orient was now perceived as more familiar and less threatening, as if it was *domesticated*. Furthermore, he adds, right after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire would crumble, and the Qing Empire was also weaker. Hence, he states, all these civilizations would

[119] Parissien, "European Fantasies of Asia," 353-5.
[120] Ibid., 351.

become part of the Western imagery and be turned into wonderful subjects for representation – in theatre as in forms of visual arts. In these representations Oriental characters were depicted as harmless and peaceful, and in most cases androgenic characters, a characteristic highlighting the lack of interest Europeans had towards individual identities, he observes.[121] The lack of a precise identity and total inaccuracy in the depiction of these Oriental figures is indeed typical of these representations in the Early-Modern period. I have already mentioned above Impey's take on the topic of precision, but I believe that in this case Jacobson's words are even more clarifying:

> "To the seventeenth-century eye 'the East' was an entity, a single source of bizarre customs and fabulous treasure. A general geographical confusion, an uncertainty regarding what was where, and where was what, persisted until the end of the century, and there was little attempt to distinguish imports from the East on stylistic grounds. Goods from China, Japan, Siam, and India were assigned random attributions in a spirit of topographical indifference engendered by the belief that it was all so outlandish out there that little purpose would be served by precision."[122]

Such a statement efficiently sums up what the state of several kinds of arts would become at the end of the 17th century, and what consequences this would lead to: an unprecedented diffusion of depictions of Oriental characters that all looked like each other, slightly erotic, frivolous and often looking as if they were under the effect of some hallucinogens.[123] Such stereotypical depictions would then further spread to all strata of society and strengthen the idea that all Oriental characters looked alike and they were frivolous and aloof as they looked in these depiction, something that strongly recalls the idea of Orientalism proposed by Said: an Orient that was seen as weak, in strong opposition with what Europe was and saw itself as.[124] I strongly believe that Parissien's work efficiently sums up the issues behind the representation of Oriental characters in the Early-Modern period and its consequences than much of the scholarship specialized on the topic has done in entire volumes. Nevertheless, it leaves out a player that was of fundamental importance for the birth of *Chinoiserie* and its consequences: the Netherlands. As I have extensively surveyed throughout this work, the contribution of the

[121] Parissien, "European Fantasies of Asia," 352.
[122] Jacobson, *Chinoserie*, 31.
[123] Parissien, "European Fantasies of Asia," 352.
[124] Said, *Orientalism, 1-2*.

Dutch society in the production of a shared imagery on the Orient. Not only Parissien's sees the "invasion" of *Orientalia* as starting from 1683 onwards, but it also overlooks completely the contribution of the Dutch society to phenomena of collecting and displaying of *Orientalia* which would then give birth in turn to *Chinoiserie* in visual and architectural arts. Although in fact in spaces such as the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room the core of the exhibited pieces was still chiefly genuinely Chinese (although as we have seen correct geographic labels did not matter back then), the role played by the depictions of Oriental characters in such space heavily influenced the visual imagery of the Orient of the whole of Europe in the following decades. The characters on media such as the *kuancai* screens (**fig. 25**) are to a degree comparable to those that would later be reprised as core elements of European rococo *Chinoiserie*, as in the Naples Porcelain *Boudoir* for example (**fig. 26**).

25. Detail from one of the *kuancai* panels

These characters, that from a Chinese perspective could be interpreted as being part of a tradition in the figurative arts and are coherent and consistent to a certain kind of local artistic discourse are, I believe, one of the main reasons for the birth of a stereotypical images of the Orient in European culture. To the eyes of Europeans that did not know neither the specific episodes depicted in this kind of panels that would broadly circulate in the West, nor the general 'rules' in the narrativity typical of Chinese figurative arts, these images may have certainly looked weird.

As a result, in later representation of Oriental characters in European figurative arts, such as in the one of the Porcelain *Boudoir* in Naples, these figures are always represented as detached from any historical period, suspended in a faraway foreign past that did not matter to the European viewers and that could be easily seen as belonging to a present that was far away and unknowable to the eyes of the viewers, just as the American art historian

Linda Nochlin has suggested in regards with Orientalist European painting of the 18th century.[125] The lack of evolution in the features of these characters, represented in either genuine Asian artefacts or in their European equivalent certainly played a role in the diffusion of stereotypes, be these physical or cultural. Tracing direct connections between these spaces is rather difficult, but it is worth keeping in mind that images of the Orient would back then easily travel through the images printed, or in other media, such as Delftware tiles in late 17th century Netherlands.[126] For all these reasons I believe that indeed, one of the main issues with Said's Orientalism is that it should be, at least partly, backdated, and major relevance should be given to its visual, rather than just literary, forms. Furthermore, more attention should be given to the Netherlands as a hub for the production and diffusion of forms of visual and material orientalism that easily pervaded all of Western Europe from the 17th century onwards. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, this has partly been done with the publication of works such as the collective volumes *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (2014), *Asia in Amsterdam. The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* (2015), or Benjamin Schmidt's *Inventing Exoticism. Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (2015).


26. Detail from the decoration of the Porcelain *Boudoir* in Naples

A final, short remark I would like to make before moving on to the conclusions of this work is that of the role played by women and how they ended up being so strongly identified with *Orientalia*. As I have highlighted in the first chapter, back in the late Middle Age and during the Renaissance, practices of collections of *Orientalia* were still heavily related to apical figures such as popes and kings and most certainly these objects were not directly

[125] Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 35.
[126] Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 227.

available to women, regardless of their hierarchic ranking. Furthermore, Wunderkammers and Cabinets of Curiosities, where these objects were kept at the beginning were an exclusive male dominion. Nevertheless, as Bischoff has highlighted in her essay on the spread of Oriental-style Rooms and their relationship with the women of the House of Orange, from the 17th century onwards, these spaces would become an almost exclusive female prerogative.[127] This kind of shift, from male to female usership is, I believe, once again to be attributed to the domestication of *Orientalia* during the 17th century. When every magical property attributed to porcelain was deemed as untrue, and way more when these objects would actively start being physically used rather than just collected and exhibited (hence perhaps already at the Medici court), their identity changed, and they became closer to jewels and other objects typical of the male domain. Of course, there are obvious exceptions to this, such as Fredrick III's room in Charlottenburg. Nevertheless, with time porcelain and other *Orientalia*, such as lacquer, would become more easily attributed to women than to men. The topic of "gendered collections" has been the object of study of a short essay by Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf, where they discuss the "gender of objects." In their survey, they argue that although the activity of collecting can neither be pinpointed as either masculine or feminine, some objects are often prerogative of one or the other gender.[128] One of the points they rise there is that women are more oriented towards collections of decorative arts, whereas men tend to collect more figurative arts.[129] Again, it is impossible to pinpoint the reasons behind such a shift with precision. I however believe this had to do in particular with the mass arrival and, in parallel, the imitation of porcelain in Western Europe, which made these objects less rare and closer to objects of *relatively* common use. In turn, the political use women of the House of Orange would make of these objects amplified this phenomenon and made them even more associated to the female sphere.

This would in turn, I argue, lead to a feminization of the Orient itself: since this objects were closely associated the Orient which, once again, was not a precise entity, but more comparable to a product and a projection of a shared imagery embedded into European's mind.[130] I therefore believe that a serious analysis of what *Chinoiserie* was, must take into account how Orient was at some point gendered and put in contrast with

[127] Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the Rise of the Porcelain Cabinet," 172.
[128] Belk, and Wallendorf, "Of mice and men: gender identity in collecting," 242.
[129] Ibid., 243.
[130] Said, *Orientalism,* 3.

the West, which was instead masculine.[131] As Nochlin, in her analysis of Western 19th-century paintings of the Orient, points out, the characters appearing there are often women depicted as aloof, sexually provocative, and decadent.[132] It is therefore possible, I believe, to find a correspondence between the femininization of *Orientalia* and a subsequent femininization of the Orient as a whole, and to therefore find the roots of Orientalism first in the Early-Modern visual and social sphere rather than in the literature of the 19th century, as Said suggests.[133]

Throughout this last chapter I have highlighted what I would like to term as the *consequences* of exhibiting *Orientalia*. In particular, I have discussed the Oriental-style Rooms in relations with the concept of Orientalism and that of gendered collecting practices, which are of course intertwined. From this, I have stressed upon the influence the Early-Modern Dutch society on both these concepts: not only most of the images of the Orient populating the shared European imagery would actually originate in the Netherlands, but the strong association between *Orientalia* and women might as well have originated there.

Defining a unitarian theoretical framework for the understanding of these rooms is indeed a daunting task: not only it is difficult (and might at time be controversial) to define what rooms would fit into this category, but the complex interplays of the several possible stakeholders involved in their conception and creation make this even more difficult. For each of these rooms several aspects have to be taken into account, such as:

1) Ownership (male/female)
2) Nature of the pieces exhibited (Genuine/Import/Imitation)
3) Historical Period (the divide could roughly be pinpointed as the year 1700)
4) Relationship between the room in analysis and earlier examples
5) Geographic place of construction
6) Depiction of characters with Oriental features (or its absence)

But of course several more aspects can be considered for any single Oriental-style Room. What I have tried to do here was to propose a few points to keep in mind when analysing these rooms as single objects, other than analysing them for their decorative apparatus and so forth. What I hope this analysis and its results may lead to is, as declared in the introduction, a deeper awareness in the understanding of Oriental-style Rooms as complex

[131] Pearce, *On Collecting*. 310.
[132] Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 42-3.
[133] Said, *Orientalism*, 4.

objects that are very telling of a certain period in the history of the relationship between Asia and Europe. More specifically I see this rooms as objects that are meaningful for the Western understanding of the Orient over the centuries and the way this conception of the Orient would be given material form through practices of collecting and exhibiting.

Conclusion

In this work I have analysed several aspects related to the evolution in the relationship between *Orientalia* and Western Society, in terms of collecting and exhibiting practices. As declared in the introduction, the main research question revolved around the possession of *Orientalia* over the centuries, the way these were integrated into European material culture and with what consequences for the European understanding of the Orient at large. To gain insights in that regard, I thought it was meaningful to analyse the way *Orientalia* were treated over the centuries in Europe, paying particular attention to the phenomenon of porcelain pieces in metal mountings, already discussed by Anna Grasskamp (2019), as a form of domestication of foreign objects. What I argue is that, indeed, such practices can be considered in that light, and that, by extension, this could also be applied to the spaces used to contain these collections, even later, during the Early-Modern period, when practices of mounting were abandoned. As I have highlighted here, it is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when *Orientalia* would stop being mounted in metal, but I believe that this could roughly be associated to those places where porcelain and other *Orientalia* were more abundant: the Medici court of Florence in the early 16th century and possibly the court of Philip II of Spain during the same years. Nevertheless, a dramatic shift would take place in the Early-Modern Netherlands, which would quickly gain a prominent position in the import of Chinese porcelain, Japanese lacquerware and other *Orientalia* at the beginning of the 17th century.

The birth of larger collections of *Orientalia* would in turn allow the birth of spaces exclusively dedicated to these collections, such as the main case study of this work, the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Rooms. However, as I argue, in agreement with scholars such as Bischoff (2014) or Impey (1977), such rooms are not to be considered as having originated out of thin air. Instead, I believe, these Oriental-style Rooms, as I call them here, can be seen as a late development of Wunderkammers, which had started to flourish across Europe during the late Renaissance and that were places mostly used for study reasons. Before the growth in terms of availability of *Orientalia* in Europe, these objects were indeed kept into Wunderkammers, along with treasuries, were they were often studied due to their rarity and due to alleged magical properties. The presence of more *Orientalia* would possibly prompt for the birth of Oriental-style Rooms. Just like Wunderkammers, the main aim of these spaces was to elicit a sense of awe and wonder in their visitors and,

furthermore, in most cases Oriental-style Rooms were enclosed and almost hidden spaces, although this was not always the case. Differently from Wunderkammers instead, these places would lose their nature of a study place and their usership was almost exclusively feminine as they would spread all over Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Akin to the symbolic function mounting practices would play for single pieces of *Orientalia*, I argue that the same could be said of these rooms as well: their enclosed nature would be used to keep them detached and separated from the rest of the palace. Hence, they were chained and unable to 'pollute' the space with their foreign aura.

Yet another way *Orientalia* were domesticated is, as argued by Odell (2018), who gives the example of Delftware (although earlier experiments had already taken place across Europe), through the production of imitations. These objects, crafted in Europe, were aesthetically imitating Chinese porcelain and Japanese lacquerware. Their broad-based diffusion allowed the aesthetic features of these outlandish objects to enter the houses of much of the Dutch population (and later also the rest of Europe). This process led to the birth of objects which would commonly be found in European interiors enriched with a surface that would have looked Oriental to the eyes of people in those days, and therefore able to evoke the presence of the Orient itself.

The three phenomena I have enlisted here (mounting of single pieces, creation of specific rooms and imitation) can certainly be seen as the main ways the need for Europeans to domesticate these objects might have worked. However, as I have argued here, the enclosed nature of these spaces (which, although *Orientalia* were widely diffused across the Dutch population also outside Oriental-style rooms would still be created during the Early-Modern period and would spread to the rest of Europe) could also be seen as a way to keep the Orient detached and isolated within Western households. These rooms were filled with collections of *Orientalia* but, as I have observed in the case of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, the presence of objects with oriental features, as the small table there, was aiming at having the whole room, not only the collection, Oriental-looking. Together with the practices that would take place within these Oriental-style Rooms, chiefly that of noblewomen gathering there while drinking tea, a drink that had been imported from Asia and that was in fashion back then, would make these rooms places where people would perform the Orient. This deliberate research for spaces that would look transcultural and, in this case *orientalized*, and the way these were performed were, I believe, the most effective and powerful ways through which the Orient was domesticated into European culture. Such a phenomenon of orientalization of European objects

(curiously going in the opposite direction of the phenomenon of Europeanization of *Orientalia* through metal mountings) is not only visible in the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, but instead would start diffusing in the Netherlands, as extensively described by the art historian Jan van Campen, as for the practices of tea consumption.[134]

It is through these performances that the Orient was actively put into practice and, in parallel with this, the ever-growing diffusion of images identified with it – either through genuine *Orientalia*, their European imitations, and the diffusion of media such as books and other depictions of Oriental characters often made by European travellers, as argued by Schmidt (2015), would fulfil the process of domestication of the Orient in Europe. This process was of course enhanced by the continuous expansion of European colonial empires in Asia and a constant growth of *Orientalia* available on the European market.

Another point I have explored here stems from such a fulfilment in the domestication of *Orientalia* and of the Orient at large: the issues related to Orientalism. The concept of Orientalism is in fact of fundamental importance to understand the attitude of Europeans towards the Orient and therefore the consequences deriving from the possession of *Orientalia* and the diffusion of these rooms. Indeed, I do not believe that, at least in the case of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room, such places had an openly mocking or diminishing purpose towards Asian people. The fact that this and other rooms were conceived by employing either genuine *Orientalia* or their imitations which would chiefly aiming at the imitation of natural patterns found on *Orientalia*, rather than depictions of Oriental-looking characters, makes it difficult to openly talk about Orientalist reductions and stereotypes as Said does in the context of 18th century novels, for example. This kind of discourse, I believe, could instead be applied to later examples of Oriental-style Rooms, such as the Porcelain *Boudoir* in Naples (1747-1749) which actually contains representations of Oriental characters with a result that is, if not utterly mocking, at least largely stereotypical and clichéd.

Nevertheless, as I have argued in the last chapter, the visual roots of Orientalism are certainly to be found in the spread of this kind of rooms and in the practices of exhibiting and imitating *Orientalia* I have listed above. The shared imagery, I argue, created by the rapid and constantly growing spread of depictions related to the Orient and then also Oriental characters, fostered by another powerful medium such as literature, and practices of performance of the Orient which may have taken place in these rooms would contribute

[134] Van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the interior," 196-7.

to such an imagery and soon become a deeply rooted part of European culture. The material embodiments this imagery would take could indeed have features we would now describe as informed from Orientalist discourses and stereotypes which we are now very much aware of.

Hence, although it is not openly possible to talk about Orientalism in the context of these rooms and of collecting practices of *Orientalia* (at least at this stage, since collecting practices in the European colonies in later periods would become one of the most representative and painful symbols of colonialism) it is certainly possible to admit the possibility that the roots of Orientalism, at least from a visual perspective, could be found in 17th century Netherlands. Also in this regard, it is worth keeping in mind that, whereas at a later stage, with the colonial expansion of the European countries in Asia, these would start having a patronizing and mocking attitude towards the conquered territories, this did not apply during the 17th and even later during the 18th century. In fact, as stressed upon by the Dutch art historian Weststeijn, several European philosophers, amongst which the Dutch philosopher Vossius (1577-1649) and later the French one Voltaire (1694-1778) would instead share a very high opinion of the Orient and of China in particular.[135] This did not only apply to the technical innovations coming from China, such as porcelain and other objects that were not easily imitable in Europe. In fact, China (or better, the image of China in 17th century Netherlands) was seen as highly positive, to the point it was very much seen as a proper Utopia.[136]

Therefore, although the birth of some stereotypes can certainly be seen as having stemmed in the Netherlands, it is worth keeping in mind that the general image of China, one of the most common subjects of mockery in depictions belonging to the fashion of *Chinoiserie* and *Singerie*, as well as one of the most common places associated to the Orient, was positive. Indeed, some the images of the Orient analysed by Schmidt in his work, such as the frontispiece of Nieuhof's book illustrated by Van Meurs and circulating during the 17th century were proposing some stereotypical reductions of the characters there appearing, reductions that would soon become typical of the imagery of the Orient in the Netherlands and in Europe, but it is difficult to openly term them 'diminishing' or 'mocking'. Similarly, the association between the products traded to the West and the population crafting them, that led to Chinese porcelain being termed 'china', and Japanese

[135] Weststeijn, "Cultural reflections on porcelain in the 17th-century Netherlands," 229-30.
[136] Ibid., 226-7.

lacquerware originating the term 'japanning', are certainly forms of reduction, but they cannot be associated directly with a negative view of those countries, I believe.

Another discourse is the one that can be done in regards with the association between the Orient and the female domain in Early-Modern Netherlands. Scholars such as Nochlin (1989) have highlighted how the Orient would become, in the 18th and 19th centuries, a concept highly charged with femininity due to the diffusion of Orientalist paintings (chiefly crafted in France). Other scholars, such as Belk and Wallendorf (1994) have instead highlighted the constant association with goods such as porcelain and women in the European. However, as I have extensively described here, for centuries the most prized *Orientalia*, and chiefly porcelain, were an almost exclusive male possession. Things would indeed start to change in the Netherlands when, thanks to the growth of *Orientalia* available on the market would increase and Oriental-style Rooms would start being assembled, during the 17th century. Besides, as Bischoff (2014) has highlighted, these rooms would diffuse in Northern Europe first and foremost due to the strong will of Dutch women belonging to the House of Orange, to the point that these rooms would end up being called "Dutch rooms" and had an almost political meaning, signifying the trading power and the culture of the Dutch ruling dynasty. In the same period, on the other hand, it is worth underlining that in the rest of Europe, similar types of pavilions would instead remain an almost exclusive male space, such as in the case of the *Porzellanzimmer* in Charlottenburg or the Chinese Pavillion in Stockholm. As for the case of the domestication of *Orientalia*, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific moment when this association between the Orient and the female would take its steps but associating it with the environment of 17th century Netherlands would perhaps not be completely farfetched or ill-founded.

Furthermore, although Oriental-style Rooms in the Netherlands would remain a prerogative of noblewomen of the House of Orange that would later export it across Europe, porcelain would remain a symbol of personal cultivation and respectability for citizens belonging to the middle-class, and men in particular.[137] An association between women and these spaces instead, might derive from the secluded and concealed role they might have been attributed to them in the society of the 17th century, in open contrast with other examples of these rooms, such as Fredrick I's *Porzellanzimmer*, which was used as a boardroom, rather than as a room for the exhibiting of porcelain.[138]

[137] Van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the interior," 205-6.
[138] Impey, *Chinoiserie*, 164.

One final and rather short point I want to make derives from the processes of orientalization undergone by the set-up of Oriental-style Rooms. Indeed, on the one hand, they meaningful for the understanding of the increased capacities and possibilities of Westerners during the Early-Modern period. On the other hand, instead, I believe that these rooms, and the practices associated to them are revealing of Westerners to constantly be in touch with what they would perceive as exotic, even though some of these spaces were entirely crafted in Europe. The concept of exotic has been discussed, amongst other, by the anthropologist S. W. Foster, who has paid particular attention on the way this is built into one culture, be it Western or other. That of the exotic is, according to him, an *épistémè* in the Foucaldian sense.[139] By stating that, he means that the exotic is a fixed category and cultural problematic in the mind of humans, with very specific features. In particular, it would constantly be representing the Other. What derives from this is that what is considered surprising and marvellous is often associated to it. It is a place of delight, of amusement, pretty much like the Oriental-style Rooms to which I have dedicated this work. However, he warns, domesticating it would mean to neutralize and defuse the aspects which are the more delightful to the eye of the Westerners.[140] Hence, it is always kept *distant* and mysterious enough, so not to completely integrate it within our culture, because that would mean to cancel its relevance to our culture and the reason why we find it entertaining. Therefore, even though as I have described throughout this whole work, the processes through which Westerners have tried to integrate Oriental material cultures within their own could be seen as processes for the domestication of the Orient at large, this has never been domesticated. Instead it has been constantly researched and reinvented in order to please the aspirations and the expectations of Westerners. All in all, it would seem like the sentence by Aernout van Buchel, that I have reported in the Preface of this work, neatly sums up the relationship of Early-Modern people with *Orientalia* and therefore with the exotic: something that is the more beautiful the more far away and vague it appears, so that the expectations and feelings of awe and wonder can be projected onto it. Distance and unfamiliarity make indeed, everything wonderful.

[139] Foster, "The Exotic as a Symbolic System," 21.
[140] Ibid., 21.

Afterword

What I have done in this work was an attempt at discussing the history of the relationship between Westerners and the Orient through the practices related to the possession and the usage of *Orientalia*. As readers will have noticed, it has been a challenging (and sometimes daunting) task. What I hope I have provided readers with is, however, sufficient insights to at least understand how such a relationship has depended on several factors over time, and that most of them would depend on European, rather than on Asian, culture.

It was my intention, as declared in the preface of this work, to underline how the Orient was (and it still is, to an extent) a product of the European imagination, and how our relationship is directly dependent on the mind of Westerners of the past and, as I have highlighted in the conclusions, how much the image of the Orient depended on their expectations. These Oriental-style Rooms are nothing but a material embodiment of the expectation and the imagination of Westerners about the Orient, and the way these rooms would change is also symptomatic of a change in Western culture.

In this work, although I have referred to several rooms, I have studied in detail just one of them. In the future, also to help in redefine many concepts to which I have nothing but referred here, such as those of Orientalism and *Chinoiserie* I intend to keep along this track and look for the connections between these rooms and the way Orient is represented there. From this kind of study, I hope, a clearer view onto Oriental-style Rooms as an object *per se*, rather than as a simple manifestation of *Chinoiserie*, will stem and further grow.

Appendix A - Glossary

- *Celadon*: this term addresses a kind of greenware originating in Longquan, present-day region of Zhejiang, eastern China. Celadon ware is characterized by green bluish to green hues, deriving from a small quantity of iron oxide in the glaze applied, which is fired at an elevated temperature in a reducing atmosphere.

- Blue-and-white porcelain: this kind of porcelain would soon gain prominence and surpass the popularity of other types of productions, including celadon and *qingbai* porcelain. It was fired at extremely elevated temperatures, hence the possible colours for painting it were limited to three, based on oxides employing either iron, copper or cobalt.

- Delftware: it is the term employed to address a kind of tin-glazed earthenware produced in the Netherlands from the beginning of the 17th century to imitate Chinese blue and White porcelain.

- *Kuancai* (款彩): Chinese term for "incised and painted," mostly employed to address lacquered objects. In Europe, these objects are usually called *Coromandel* lacquer since they were stockpiled in the Coromandel region of India before being exported to Europe.

- *Qingbai* (青白): It is a type of porcelain produced under the Song and Yuan dynasties. Its name derives from the type of ceramic glaze used. It is white with a blue-greenish tint. It was chiefly made in Jiangxi province in south-eastern China, in several locations including Jingdezhen.

- *Yue* (越): These pieces have a stoneware body and an olive or brownish-green glaze and belong to the family of celadons. Their colours are the result of a wash of slip containing a high proportion of iron that was put over the body before glazing. The iron interacted with the glaze during the firing and coloured it.

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For what concerns the pictures of the Rijksmuseum Lacquer Room (Accession no. BK-16709), all their credits are rightfully attributed to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

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