The Changing Perception and Presentation of China: Viewed through Displays of Porcelain in Dutch Interiors and Museums

Kokke, Michelle

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Michelle Kokke
Master Thesis Asian Studies: History, Arts and Culture of Asia
Leiden University
Supervisor: Dr Fan Lin
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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Display, Representation, Porcelain, China, Dutch museums

This thesis examines displays of Chinese porcelain in Dutch museums and how they constructed an image of China. Chinese commodities, especially porcelain, ended up in the Netherlands due to increasing trade relations between Europe and China during the seventeenth century. Chinese porcelain was collected and put on display in Dutch interiors. This was mainly done to express the identity of the collector, thus reframing Chinese porcelain in a Dutch context. These porcelain collections eventually ended up in museum displays that framed Chinese porcelain within Western-centered and Orientalist frameworks. From the twenty-first century onwards, museum professionals have attempted to move beyond this Orientalist framework.

This thesis aims to evaluate the narratives about Chinese porcelain and China that are being presented by twenty-first century displays of Chinese porcelain in Dutch museums. The analysis is performed through the observation of contemporary museum displays and focusses on the concept of framing. Attention is paid to aspects such as visual design, layout, and textual framing through object labels and wall panels. The analysis is used to evaluate the extent to which Dutch museums present Chinese porcelain as part of Western-centered and Orientalist narratives. The outcomes show that many museums still present a Western-centered narrative and use Orientalist modes of display which highlight the otherness of Chinese porcelain.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with contemporary displays of Chinese porcelain inside Dutch museums and how they impact the viewer's perception of China. Direct interactions between Europe and China gained momentum in the context of trade and the exchange of commodities such as tea, silk, and porcelain. Western traders were unable to gain comprehensive insights into the country due to restricted access to China's designated trade ports.[1] As a result, material objects were used as a primary tool to learn more about China, its people, and its culture.[2] Imported Chinese objects were used as representatives of Chinese culture, conveying a message not only about itself, but also about the country and context from which they originated. This is a practice that is still taking place today within the context of museum displays.

The decision to specifically focus on porcelain stems from its prominent presence in Dutch museums, where Chinese porcelain displays are abundant. From the seventeenth century onwards, Chinese porcelain was considered a collector's item in the Netherlands, where it was put on display inside Dutch interiors. Eventually, these collections ended up inside Dutch museums. Tea and silk also played a significant role in the trade between China and the Netherlands but these goods were meant to be consumed, not collected. As a result, tea and silk have less frequently been used to represent Chinese culture in museum displays. Another justification for focusing on porcelain is its status as a quintessential symbol of Chinese culture in Europe. Evidently, the term "china" itself is often used interchangeably with porcelain and tableware, further solidifying its cultural significance.[3]

Museums all have their own approach to displaying their porcelain collection. The master narrative of the museum, determined by the collection's history and the museum's agenda, has a strong impact on how Chinese porcelain is framed. Framing is an element of display which is concerned with the contextualization of objects to shape the visitor's perception of them. Framing can be done through contextualization, narrative construction, and visual design. The framing of Chinese porcelain directly impacts the perception of China in the Western world. Curators actively construct the narrative of displays by deciding what to focus on by selecting and omitting specific objects and information. These decisions are influenced by the prevailing worldviews of their time. The departure point to tackle this topic is to articulate the concepts of Orientalism in the context of displaying Chinese porcelain.

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[1] Mostert, *Silk Thread: China and the Netherlands from 1600*, p. 123
[2] Strachan, "The Lie in the Teapot: China, China Export Porcelain, and the Construction of Orientalism during the American Republic.", p. 2
[3] Yang, *Framing China: performativity and narrative in museum displays of Chinese porcelain*, p. 5

The framing of porcelain and the perception of China has not always been the same. Changing relationships between China in the Western world have had a profound impact on how China is perceived in the West. Consequently, it is essential to consider historical and political developments when discussing displays of Chinese porcelain.

The concept of Orientalism, as articulated by Edward Said (1978), offers insights into the Western perception of the East.[4] Said defines Orientalism as a lens or framework that Europeans created to understand non-Western cultures.[5] Orientalism encompasses a set of assumptions, stereotypes, and representations that Western scholars, artists, and writers, have historically employed to portray and analyze foreign cultures.[6] Initially, the Orient was defined as mysterious, romantic, exotic, and inferior in comparison to the West.[7] One of the key characteristics of Orientalism is its inherent Western-centrism, which means that Western values served as the norm which was used to judge foreign cultures. A strong narrative that emerged was that of China as the opposite of Europe. China was described as stagnant or even backwards in contrast to the rapidly modernizing West.[8]

Early nineteenth-century museum displays of Chinese objects reflected Orientalist sentiments about China. Foreign objects became part of ethnographic collections where they were valued for their representative qualities as opposed to European objects which were displayed in art museums where they were valued for their artistic expression. Secondly, non-western objects were often presented geographically while European objects were presented chronologically, indicating Western advancement as opposed to Eastern stagnation.[9]

In the wake of the twenty-first century, museum professionals have made efforts to redefine their collections, shifting away from a Western-centric approach and striving to present more nuanced narratives of foreign cultures, such as China.[10] This thesis seeks to examine the degree of success Dutch museums have achieved in transcending imperialist and Orientalist portrayals of China, and whether they have effectively constructed a more multifaceted narrative within their contemporary displays.

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[4] Said focuses on (literary) representations of Islamic people and the Middle East in the West but his framework can also be applied to Asia because both areas were considered exotic places that were subjected to Orientalist practices.
[5] Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 2-3
[6] Ibid. p. 80
[7] Ibid. 1
[8] Lee, "Introduction: Ideas of Asia in the Museum," p. 364
[9] Ibid. p. 359
[10] The need to reframe collections was a result of the decolonization process of the (late) 20th century. Former colonizers started to look critically at their own past and their relationships with former colonies. Colonial sentiments were reflected in the presentation of objects from the colonies inside the Metropole. To establish new relationships with newly independent nations, the framing of objects had to be re-envisioned. (Witcomb, 2015)

State of the Field

The impact of museum displays on visitors has been extensively discussed within the field of museum studies. Scholars have closely examined the concept of display in relation to collecting, framing, and museum-visitor dynamics. The origin of museum collections can be traced back to early European collections which were owned by monarchs, nobility, and later wealthy merchants. It is crucial to recognize that displaying objects is far from a neutral act, as objects are purposefully collected for specific reasons. Andrea Bubenik's (2021) research has explored the potential motivations behind the establishment of early European collections, ranging from the sixteenth-century Studiolo to the nineteenth-century sculpture and picture galleries.[11] Similarly, Gijsbert M. van de Roemer (2005) has focused on the specific situation in the Netherlands, identifying both shared and distinct motives for collecting.[12] In reality, multiple motivations are often intertwined in the decision to start a collection. Some of these motivations can be categorized under the aspiration to express particular identities such as military victor, educated member of society, and legitimate ruler. To effectively convey identity, wealth, and status, collections needed to be accessible and visible to the public. Consequently, the act of collecting and the act of displaying are intricately linked.

Early European collections had a semi-private, semi-public character and could often only be viewed by a limited group of individuals. For instance, spaces like the Studiolo were meant for private study and contemplation. However, they also functioned as a reception room where the owner received important visitors and presented himself as a well-educated and cultured member of society.[13] During the eighteenth century, significant developments took place in collecting and display practices. Firstly, objects began to be categorized and collections became specialized by focusing on a specific category such as paintings, sculptures, natural artefacts, or ethnographic objects. Secondly, many private (non-royal) collections became separated from their owners. After collectors passed away, their collections were often put up for auction, causing the collection to become dispersed. In some cases, objects were donated to public institutions such as universities.[14] These institutions primarily functioned as safe-keepers of collections and made objects available for study to a selected group of people.

[11] Buberik, "Display," p. 325
[12] Roemer, *Theorieën over natuur en kunst in de verzameling van zeldzaamheden van Simon Schijnvoet (1652-1727)*, p. 14
[13] Buberik, "Display," p. 327
[14] Abt, "The Origins of the Public Museum," p. 124

The nineteenth century marked a significant turning point in the accessibility of collections, coinciding with a period of social reforms and democratic ideals. It was during this era that collections began to transition from semi-public to fully public, as highlighted by Jeffery Abt (2011), thereby distinguishing a collection from a museum. With museums no longer reflecting the singular intentions of individual owners, institutions faced the task of determining how best to present their collections to a wider audience. The focus was put on education through new display techniques such as the addition of text labels and the creation of thematic exhibitions. Simultaneously, the surge of nationalism in the nineteenth century exercised a profound impact on the narrative of museum displays. Museums received responsibility for preserving and presenting the nation's history and heritage. Consequently, the study of museum-visitor dynamics and narrative framing gained more prominence from this time onwards.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) has argued that museums have the power to create knowledge by expressing constructed narratives through their displays. The knowledge that is created is not neutral because the curator or exhibition maker has the power to make decisions on how to present a certain story.[15] In this process, certain objects and information can be excluded or highlighted. However, the museum curator is not the only one who has an impact on the interpretation of museum displays. Art historian Michael Baxandall (1991) coined the idea that meaning inside the museum is a collaborative endeavour. Three factors contribute to the process of knowledge creation: Firstly, the object itself expresses ideas about its creator and the cultural context in which it was produced. Secondly, the curator or exhibition maker utilizes the object in combination with other objects to construct a narrative. Lastly, museum visitors possess their own frameworks, shaped by their past experiences, through which they make sense of objects. Therefore, the visitor's interpretation of the museum exhibition can differ from the intended narrative constructed by the curator or exhibition.[16]

The framing of foreign objects within European museums has been studied thoroughly in the context of twentieth-century decolonization efforts.[17] Although the Netherlands never colonized China, curators have frequently employed the same approach when exhibiting objects from non-colonized but foreign places. According to Anthony Shelton (2011), displays of Asian objects often mirrored the interests and perspectives of the former colonial metropole. Anna

[15] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*
[16] Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intentions," p. 37
[17] See for example: Batteau, J.M, et al. "Lessons from the Past?: Cultural Memory in Dutch Integration Policy." European Journal of Political Research 57, no. 3 (2018): 740–58. And Beurden, Jos van. *Inconvenient Heritage : Colonial Collections and Restitution in the Netherlands and Belgium*. Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2022.

Grasskamp and Annette Loeseke (2015) have described how the display of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is meant to reflect Dutch glory by highlighting Dutch-Chinese trade relations that contributed to the prosperity of the Netherlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gert Oostindie (2008) has published works on how Dutch colonialism has affected the Dutch concept of cultural heritage. The concept of shared cultural heritage in the Netherlands is focused on overseas remnants of a colonial past such as buildings that used to serve as former colonial institutions. Chinese porcelain was not included in the category of shared cultural heritage.

Mirjam Shatanawi (2022) has pointed out how paintings by the Flemish-French painter Jean Baptiste Vanmour (1671-1737) were continuously reframed within Dutch collections to align with the objectives of Dutch museum professionals. The paintings were owned by the Rijksmuseum but were loaned to the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. Due to their Oriental subject matter and perceived inferior quality, these paintings were categorized as ethnographic objects rather than as European art.[18] However, at the onset of the twenty-first century, the Rijksmuseum reevaluated their presentation. The Rijksmuseum utilized the paintings to convey the diplomatic relations between the Western and Eastern worlds, as well as to highlight the multicultural society of the Netherlands.[19] Within this narrative, the museum still highlights the dichotomy between West and East by emphasizing the differences between two cultures.

A dissertation by Pao-Yi Yang (2021) forms a significant contribution to the study of the framing of Chinese porcelain within Western displays. Yang's research examines permanent and temporary porcelain displays at renowned institutions such as the Rijksmuseum, British Museum, Metropolitan Museum, Peabody Essex Museum, and the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. By focusing on these case studies, Yang explores the performativity of porcelain displays within a contemporary global context. The concept of performativity encompasses display techniques and their impact on shaping the narrative of an exhibition. Yang identifies four distinct display approaches and narratives: the trans-bordering display and transcultural narrative, the self-fashioning narrative, the fetishizing and exoticizing narrative, and the repositioned narrative. Of particular significance is Yang's emphasis on the role of written text in framing displays by employing techniques such as focalization to influence the viewer's interpretation.

[18] Shatanawi, “On the In-Betweenness of Paintings of Jean Baptiste Vanmour (1671-1737) at the Rijksmuseum,” p. 133
[19] Ibid., p. 153

My own research will focus on the developments within the Netherlands and Dutch museum collections. Studies with an international scope tend to concentrate their case studies on prominent and renowned museums such as the Rijksmuseum in the case of the Netherlands. However, by deliberately narrowing the scope to museums within the Netherlands, I can incorporate smaller and lesser-known institutions into the analysis. Despite their limited exhibition spaces and financial resources, these museums offer valuable insights into the history of collecting and displaying Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands.

Structure and Methodology

Part One provides a historical overview of the development of displays of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands. Porcelain reached Europe through trade routes such as the famous Silk Roads as early as the Middle Ages. However, the scale of porcelain that reached Europe was not large enough to make a significant impact on European display practices until the arrival of the Dutch in Asia during the sixteenth century. This period will therefore be used as the starting point of the historical analysis.

In Chapter One, the discussion centres around the inclusion of porcelain in European collections and interiors. The chapter starts with the context of the Cabinet of Curiosity, where porcelain was exhibited alongside other foreign and exotic objects. As collecting practices evolved, so did the approach to displaying porcelain. Consequently, porcelain made a shift from being housed in the Cabinet of Curiosity to finding its place in style rooms inspired by Chinese aesthetics. Subsequently, it further evolved into dedicated porcelain rooms, reflecting the growing appreciation for the exquisite material.

Chapter Two covers the late eighteenth to the twentieth century. This era witnessed is characterized by the fluctuating popularity of Chinese porcelain, influenced by various factors including its increased availability, growing knowledge about China, diminishing exotic appeal, and the emergence of new interior styles. During the 1870s, there was a revival of interest in Chinese porcelain due to the rise of nationalism. Nationalists perceived the seventeenth century as a golden age for Dutch international trade, with Chinese porcelain seen as an embodiment of that prosperous era.

Part Two consists of an analysis of contemporary museum displays of Chinese porcelain inside Dutch museums. The analysis is based on visual observations and draws upon the elements discussed by Stephanie Moser (2010), encompassing architecture, location, setting, space, design, colour, light, subject, message, text, layout, display types, exhibition style,

audience, and reception.[20] Additionally, concepts used by Yang Pao-Yi (2021) such as textual framing and focalization, are applied. Not all elements are equally applicable to each display, and therefore, they receive varying degrees of attention based on their relevance. The analysis draws upon the author's personal museum visits, supplemented by accompanying photographs taken by the author or sourced from the Internet. The porcelain displays are viewed in relation to the history of the collection and the overarching museum narrative. By doing so, I will evaluate whether old Orientalist sentiments and display approaches still resonate in the contemporary displays.

This thesis divides museum displays into four categories based on display styles. It is important to note that these categories are not definitive, as some displays may fit into multiple categories. However, to maintain clarity, the case studies have been allocated to the category that the author deems most suitable. The first category is the historical interior display, which aims to transport the visitor back in time. This is done by staging a historical interior based on historic designs. Museums with a historical display tend to focus on the history of the building and/or the collector. The second category encompasses juxtaposed displays, where Chinese porcelain is displayed alongside various types of ceramics such as Delftware, Meissen porcelain and Japanese Imari. These displays either present an imperialist narrative, showcasing all the ceramics together as a symbol of Dutch trade success, or a transcultural narrative that highlights the exchange and development of the ceramics production while framing Chinese and European ceramics as equals. The third category is the de-contextualized or aesthetic display. In this setting, the cultural context of the objects is obscured, and the focus is on the visual and material aspects of the objects. At times, this emphasis on aesthetics and materiality may verge on fetishization. The fourth, and last, category is the contextualized display. In this case, the display provides a narrative that focuses on both the Chinese and Dutch contexts of porcelain. This display mode is most successful in presenting a de-westernized narrative. These narratives aim to present a more nuanced perspective that encompasses multiple viewpoints.

[20] Moser, “The Devil is in the Detail.”

PART ONE: EARLY DISPLAYS OF PORCELAIN

The development of displays is intricately linked to the history of collecting. Collections, as defined by Krzysztof Pomian in 1987, are "… a set of objects from nature, or made by human beings, which are temporarily or definitely kept out of the circuit of economic activities; and are being protected and displayed…"[21] The earliest collections are often dated to the fifteenth century and were concentrated around European courts.

The following two chapters present an overview of the development of displays of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. This analysis explores the changing motives for collecting and the evolving systems of categorization. To exemplify these shifts, case studies featuring the collections of notable individuals such as Amalia van Solms (1602-1675) and her daughters, Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807), Nanne Ottema (1874-1955), Jan Menze van Diepen (1905-1994), and Maartje Draak (1907-1995) will be examined.

[21] Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, p.13

Chapter 1. The Introduction of Chinese Porcelain to Dutch Interiors

Sixteenth to eighteenth-century Cabinets of Curiosity

Collections from late sixteenth-century Europe are often labelled as cabinets of curiosity. These collections consisted of a diverse array of objects categorized as *naturalia* (natural rarities), *artificialia* (man-made rarities), *scientifica* (scientific instruments) and later, *exotica* (objects from foreign places).[22] The explorations of the seventeenth century forged connections between Europe and previously unfamiliar continents like Asia and the Americas, introducing a wealth of new collectables. Within Dutch cabinets, exotic objects from Asia and South America held a prominent position, particularly Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and lacquerware.[23]

During the seventeenth century, the production process of Chinese porcelain remained a mystery to Europeans. European craftsmen were unable to replicate the same qualities found in Chinese porcelain. In Europe, there was a prevailing belief that porcelain was made from crushed shells, egg whites, and plaster[24] The term "porcelain" itself was derived from the writings of the Italian merchant and explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324), who described Chinese porcelain as "genus porcellana" after the Venus shell. The material connection that was constructed between porcelain and shells was reflected in the categorization of porcelain within cabinets of curiosity. Evidence of this is visible in paintings such as a still-life by Frans Francken II from Antwerp. (Fig.1) Different categories of objects such as paintings, animal specimens, statues, coins, and shells, are depicted in separate groups. The painting exemplifies how collectors categorized their objects within Cabinets of Curiosity. The painter likely depicted the porcelain cup, on the bottom right, in proximity to the group of shells to highlight their assumed material connection. A painting by Willem Kalf, presenting a still life with a nautilus cup adorned with gilded mounts and a porcelain jar as its focal point, further illustrates the pairing of Chinese porcelain with shells due to their exotic materiality. (Fig. 2)

Within the display of the Cabinet of Curiosity, Chinese porcelain was an exotic object of mysterious origin which was collected to satisfy the European desire to obtain rare and extraordinary items. Thus, Chinese porcelain, originally an item of everyday use in China, was appropriated into European collecting practices. In this context, the term "appropriation" refers

[22] Scheurleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosity."
[23] Ibid., p.117
[24] Hartog, *Pronken met Oosters Porselein*, p. 10

to the act of extracting something from its original context and repurposing it within a different context.

The cabinets of curiosity owed their popularity to their all-compassing nature which could be used for multiple purposes. From a religious perspective, collecting objects was seen as a means to comprehend God's creations in their entirety.[25] Many collectors approached their collections with a scientific mindset, as the empirical study of objects was a prevalent method of scientific research at the time. At the time, scientific research was done through the empirical study of objects. Moreover, collections also served as a display of the collector's good taste, wealth, and social status, as only the affluent elite could afford to amass such collections.

In the case of the Dutch Stadholders, exotic objects from foreign places were utilized to convey their power. The Stadholders held prominent positions in the Dutch East-India Company (VOC). While their authority within the Netherlands was constrained by the States General, on a global scale, other nations preferred to engage with monarchs rather than the States General, which primarily consisted of merchants and regents. Consequently, the Stadholder was able to wield monarchical influence at the international level. Leveraging their connection with the VOC, the Stadholders amassed a significant collection of objects from the East Indies. Locally, these exotic objects symbolized the Stadholder and their family as rulers of the world.[26] An illustrative example is the collection of Amalia van Solms, which will be explored in further detail later on.

[25] Roemer, *Theorieën over natuur en kunst in de verzameling van zeldzaamheden van Simon Schijnvoet (1652-1727)*, P. 14
[26] Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, p. 253

Fig. 1 Cabinet of Curiosity by Frans Francken (II), 1636, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1048

Fig. 2 Still life with a porcelain bowl, a Nautilus cup and an Eastern carpet, painting, Willem Kalf, 1662, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 203 (1962.10)

Fig. 3 Punch bowl, Chinese porcelain with silver mounting, 1852, Rijksmuseum, BK-1992-1

Eighteenth-century Porcelain Rooms

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the position of Chinese porcelain within Cabinets of Curiosity underwent a gradual transformation. This shift was primarily driven by two factors: the increasing interactions between China and the Netherlands, and the changing categorization of porcelain. Porcelain had long belonged to the category of exotica thanks to its foreign origin and to the mystery surrounding its production process. Due to increased contact between China and Europe, more and more knowledge about the production process of porcelain became known. Around the mid-seventeenth century, French Jesuit Louis-Daniel le Comte (1655-1728) wrote that Chinese craftsmen did not possess superior skills and that Chinese porcelain was only special because the Chinese possessed rare natural resources that could not be found in Europe.[27] In 1608 a porcelain factory in Meissen, Germany successfully produced the first European porcelain.

As the production process of porcelain became known in Europe, porcelain gradually transitioned from being regarded as a curiosity to being considered an object of art, deserving placement alongside paintings and other artistic objects. Stephen Hartog (1990) argues that the porcelain collection of Amalia van Solms (1602-1675), wife of Dutch Stadholder Frederik Henrik (1584-1647), exemplifies this shift from the Cabinet of Curiosity towards an independent Porcelain Room. Amalia accumulated an extensive collection of porcelain throughout her life which can be traced through inventories that have survived. Amalia's Cabinet of Curiosity at the court of Noordeinde was filled with gems, exotic objects and 569 pieces of porcelain.[28] By 1673, Amalia owned over 1200 pieces of porcelain which were displayed in various residences.[29] At Huis ten Bosch, her summer residence in the Hague, Amalia had a cabinet containing 398 pieces of porcelain.[30] Besides Chinese porcelain, Amalia also owned Japanese lacquerware and Chinese and Indian textiles which were used as wall hangings, curtains, tablecloths, and furniture upholstery.[31]

Amalia played an active role in presenting the Orange-Nassau family as the rightful rulers of the Netherlands. Her extensive collection of foreign items was not only a sign of wealth but also reflected the Stadholder's control over these items and by extension the places that they came from.[32] Amalia's porcelain collection and its display were a way to legitimize her

[27] Gerritsen and MacDowall, "Material Culture and the Other: European Encounters with Chinese Porcelain, ca. 1650-1800," p. 102
[28] Hartog. *Pronken met Porselein*. p. 10
[29] Ibid. p. 149
[30] Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, p. 248
[31] Ibid., p. 224
[32] Treanor, "Une abondance extra ordinaire," p. 151

husband's power by illustrating his control over Dutch trade posts in Asia and his ability to acquire the most valuable and rarest Chinese objects.

Amalia was a trendsetter who employed innovative methods to display porcelain within her interiors.[33] For the Stadholder's quarters at the Binnenhof in The Hague, Amalia commissioned porcelain stands which likely inspired the etageres that were later implemented in the porcelain room of her daughter Henriëtte Catherina (Fig. 6). Additionally, Amalia had shelves incorporated into the room's walls, encircling the entire space. While the exact appearance of Amalia's porcelain room remains unknown, preserved designs by French architect Daniel Marot (1660/1661-1752) offer a glimpse into what her porcelain cabinet might have looked like. In the design by Marot, porcelain and paintings are displayed together, with porcelain framing the ceiling, chimney mantle, and paintings. The overall composition epitomizes the notion of "more is more." It is not the individual porcelain pieces that hold significance, but rather the abundance of porcelain that expresses wealth and power.[34]

Amalia's porcelain collection was divided and inherited by her daughters, who established new spaces for porcelain display.[35] Henriëtte Catherina had a porcelain room at the Oranienburg Palace in Dessau, Germany. The interior has not survived but a drawing of the room from 1733 by Jean Baptiste Broebes still exists. The drawing reveals that Henriëtte Catherina also employed porcelain as a decorative interior element to frame different sections of the room. Small round dishes were hung on the walls to frame windows and doorways. Three porcelain etageres, which are shaped like a pyramid and consist of multiple levels of shelves, were present as well. Besides the painted ceiling, no other art objects were placed inside the space. This makes it one of the first spaces that is completely dedicated to the display of porcelain. Figure 6 depicts one of the original etageres from 1695, which is now being used again to display Chinese porcelain.

The two case studies have effectively demonstrated the changing approach to displaying Chinese porcelain. Initially, porcelain was presented alongside other curiosities and rarities, later alongside paintings and artworks, and eventually within dedicated spaces exclusively designed for porcelain. Throughout these displays, porcelain served as a means of architectural embellishment, with its abundance serving as a testament to the immense wealth and influence of the Orange-Nassau family. The Chinese origin of the porcelain, contributed to the expression of wealth and power.

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[33] Treanor, "Une abondance extra ordinaire," p. 146
[34] Martin, "Porcelain Rooms," p. 345
[35] Hartog, *Pronken met Porselein*, p. 11

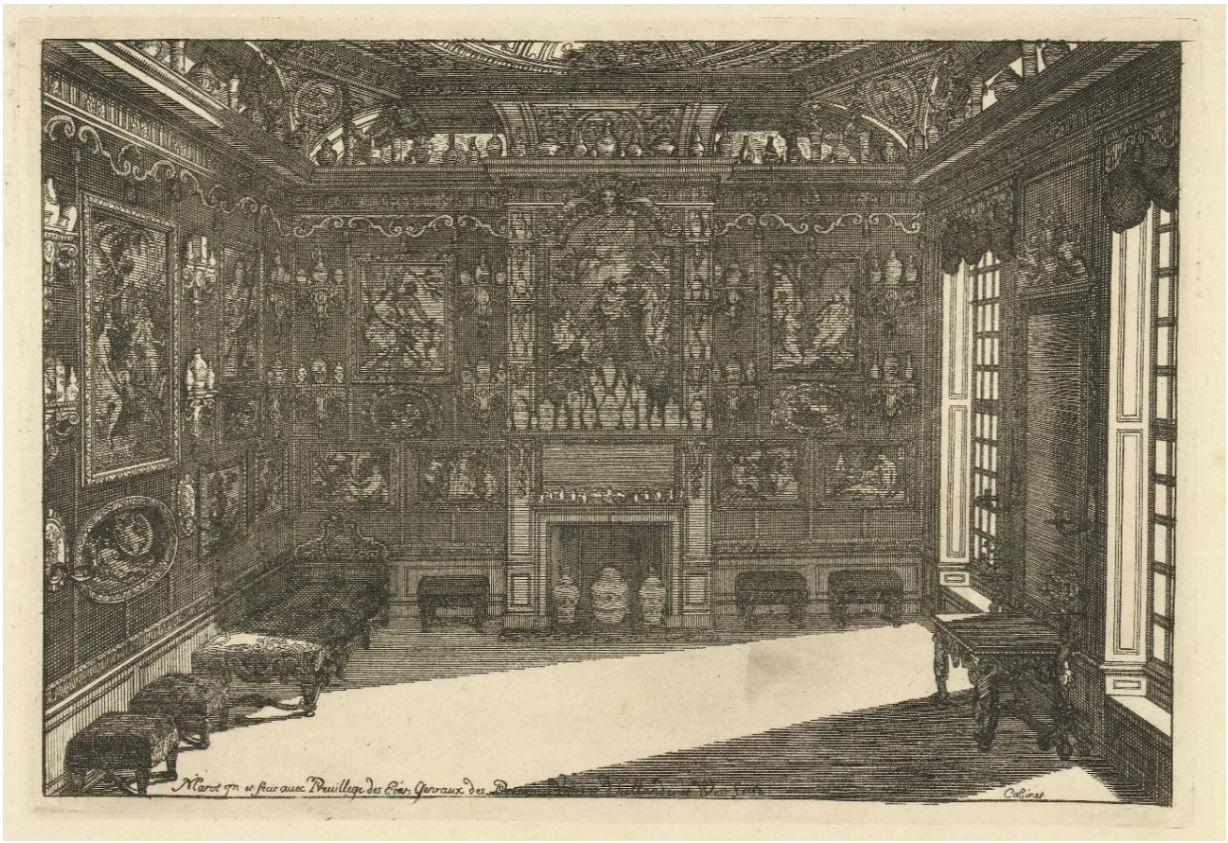

Fig. 4 Design for a cabinet with paintings and Chinese Porcelain, Daniël Marot I, 1712, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1964-3063

Fig. 5 The Porcelain Chamber at Oranienburg Palace, Jean Baptiste Broebes, folio 14, from: Vues des Palais et Maisons de Plaisence de Sa Majeste le Roy de Prusse, Ausburg, 1733, GK II (1) 14432

Fig. 6 Etagere in the Porcelain Chamber, Oranienburg Palace Museum

Chapter 2. A Period of Change: Fluctuating Popularity and Reframing

The eighteenth century: a period of fluctuating popularity, and new scholarly interest

During the eighteenth century, the status of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands experienced a decline compared to previous decades. This shift can be attributed the influx of Chinese porcelain into the Netherlands which reached such substantial quantities that its market value began to decrease.[36] Chinese porcelain became accessible to more people such as middleclass merchants who wanted to elevate their own status by imitating the interior style of the social elite. Rather than creating rooms dedicated solely to the display of porcelain, wealthy merchants incorporated porcelain into their existing interiors. Besides serving as a symbol of refined taste and affluence, porcelain also found practical use as elegant tableware associated with the increasingly popular tea-drinking culture of the time.[37] The increasing availability and association with tableware caused Chinese porcelain to lose some of its novelty status.

Secondly, the evolving aesthetic preferences of the late eighteenth-century neo-classical interior style caused the decline of the popularity of Chinese porcelain within the Dutch interior. This period witnessed the rise of European porcelain manufacturers, notably the German Meissen and French Sèvres porcelain, which emerged in 1710 and 1740, respectively. European-made porcelain offered greater flexibility in adapting to changing tastes and trends, unlike Chinese porcelain, which had to be ordered up to a year in advance.

Consequently, the combination of an oversupply of Chinese porcelain, its integration into the living spaces of the wealthy middle class, and the emergence of European porcelain led to a gradual decline in the significance and popularity of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands during the early eighteenth century. However, the popularity of Chinese objects gradually increased again from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, when European monarchs started to create ‘Indian’ or ‘Chinese’ interiors. An example of this is the Chinese Room of Huis ten Bosch Palace which was constructed between 1753 and 1805. These kinds of interiors often consisted of a combination of Chinese export products and chinoiserie. The latter is a category of objects that are European-made imitations of Chinese objects. European imitations were cheaper and could more easily be adapted to European tastes. Despite the emergence of

[36] Mostert. *Silk Thread*. p. 39
[37] Ayers. “The Early China Trade”. p.265

European porcelain, exotic objects from the East continued to be used by monarchs and the elite to express refined taste, wealth, and power.

During the eighteenth century, porcelain was being reframed from being merely a piece of interior decoration to also serving as functional tableware associated with tea drinking and as an object of study. In the following section, the collection of Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807) will be discussed to illustrate this new approach towards Chinese porcelain. According to Jan van Campen (2021), Royer should be viewed as the first amateur or proto sinologist of the Netherlands. Royer established a collection of Chinese objects which he used as tools to study the Chinese language. The primary period in which Royer worked on his Chinese studies was between 1765-1780. Royer never visited China and acquired his objects through a network of middlemen such as the V.O.C. employees Jean Paul Certon and Ulrich Gualtherus Hemmingson.[38] Correspondence between Royer and Hemmingson has survived and reveals that the two had a close friendship. Hemmingson was employed at the Dutch trading post in Guangzhou (Canton) and was able to order or acquire specific objects for Royer. Hemmingson also put Royer in contact with a Chinese tradesman, Carolus Wang, who sent Royer Chinese objects and books. Wang also helped Royer with translating Chinese text to learn the language. Royer's goal was to write a Dutch-Chinese dictionary.

Royer kept his collection inside two rooms on the upper floor of his house.[39] An inventory made in 1816 describes Royer's porcelain room as follows: there were two mirrors with a golden frame, likely placed between the windows. Elsewhere on the wall were Chinese mirrors and Chinese statues. There were 12 chairs, a table, and a lacquered box. The Chinese wallpaper likely depicted the production process of porcelain. In the corners, there were cabinets on which the porcelain was displayed. The example of Royer illustrates that in the context of a scholar-collection, porcelain was collected alongside other kinds of Chinese objects to study the culture of China. In this context, porcelain was not presented as an element of interior decoration but as a cultural object that represented the place and culture that it came from. The narrative depicted on the wallpaper emphasizes the educational purpose of the room.

During the 1790s, Royer abruptly stopped his China studies. According to Van Campen, Royer possibly gave up on his research because he believed that he could no longer contribute to the field of China studies. Royer had not been the only one studying the Chinese language and publications emerged all over Europe. The growing access to knowledge, ironically, led to a loss of mystery and discovery which caused Royer to lose interest in his China studies.

[38] Campen, *Collecting China: Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807), collections and Chinese studies*, p. 41
[39] Ibid., p.20

Nevertheless, Royer did not give up on his Chinese collection and kept the objects until his death.

The widow of Royer bequeathed his collection to king Willem I in 1814. Two years later, Royer's collection was added to the '*Koninklijke cabinet van zeldzaamheden*'. The cabinet was disbanded in 1883 and its collection was divided into the collections of the '*Rijks Ethnografisch Museum*' (now Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden) and the '*Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst*' (now Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam). 367 pieces of Chinese porcelain from Royer's collection ended up at the Rijksmuseum, of which 79 are on display.[40] Museum Volkenkunde also received pieces of porcelain such as a porcelain pagoda which is on display. Other items such as clothing, soapstone figures, paper mâché dolls, and inkstones all ended up at Museum Volkenkunde. The fact that the collection has been divided into two different museums with different narratives makes it the perfect opportunity to compare display approaches.

[40] Rijksstudio, accessed on 19-06-23, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken?q=royer&f=1&p=1&ps=12&place=China&ondisplay=True&st=Objects&ii=0

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century: a nationalist revival

From the 1870s onwards there was a revival of the interest in Chinese porcelain, which is described as a *porseleinmanie* by Henk Budel (2009). This coincided with the emergence of nationalist sentiments during the late nineteenth century, which prompted a renewed fascination with Dutch history. The Dutch population sought elements from their own past that could define their national identity, with particular emphasis on the prosperous seventeenth century, widely regarded as the Netherlands' most successful era. Chinese porcelain, representing the thriving Dutch-China trade, became intricately woven into the narrative of Dutch national history. It frequently adorned the interiors of historical buildings, becoming a significant decorative element.[41]

Budel further notes that Dutch nationalism sparked a renewed interest in Delftware, a national product from the seventeenth century. According to Budel, there was a general awareness that Delftware was inspired by Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. Budel suggests that the influence of Chinese porcelain on Delftware was what made the Dutch interested again in Chinese porcelain.[42] For instance, Willem Frederik Karel baron van Verschuer (1845-1922) collected Delftware first before he also started collecting Chinese porcelain.[43] Upon his passing in 1922, his collection was bequeathed to the Dutch State and subsequently loaned to Museum Arnhem. Collectors such as Hendrik Mesdag (1831-1915) and Abraham Bredius (1855-1946) illustrate that Chinese (and Japanese) porcelain still formed a common part of nineteenth century art collections of the social elite. Both collectors used Chinese and Japanese porcelain to decorate their interiors and later their own museums while their collection was centered around Dutch paintings. These examples illustrate again how Chinese porcelain was appropriated in a Dutch context.

In the decades that follow, collectors increasingly developed a deeper interest in their porcelain collections, engaging in the study and exploration of the porcelain itself. To illustrate this trend, this section focuses on the contributions of three notable collectors: Nanne Ottema (1874-1955), Jan Menze van Diepen (1905-1994), and Maartje Draak (1907-1995). These collectors have significantly enriched the porcelain collections of three different museums in the Netherlands: the Keramiek Museum in Leeuwarden, the Fraeylemaborg in Groningen, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

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[41] Budel. “Een porseleinmanie,” p.10
[42] Ibid. p.12
[43] Ibid.

Nanne Ottema was a notary by profession but also a prominent art historian and collector who operated in Friesland. During his life, Ottema collected around 25.000 to 30.000 objects (his own estimation) of which 4.000 pieces were Asian ceramics.[44] His main interests were Frisian cultural heritage and Asian ceramics. In 1953, Ottema published a manual on porcelain collecting with an English summary so he could reach a global audience. For this publication, Ottema researched the different kinds of Chinese porcelain and the corresponding historical periods. In his book, Ottema states that a good ceramic collector should learn the craft of pottery to truly understand the objects that he/she collects. Regrettably, no visual documentation is available to illustrate how Ottema displayed his private collection. After his death in 1955, a large part of Ottema's Asian ceramics collection became part of the collection of the Keramiek Museum. Ottema's focus on a comprehensive history of Chinese porcelain is reflected in the contemporary museum display which covers a time span of 4000 years.

Jan Menze van Diepen possessed a diverse collection that included royal memorabilia, objects connected to the cultural heritage of Groningen, and Asian ceramics. Van Diepen inherited his love for collecting from his mother who owned a large ceramics collection.[45] Van Diepen collected over 2500 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain. He particularly had a taste for Chinese export porcelain. Unlike Ottema, Van Diepen's knowledge of Asian ceramics was limited, often seeking advice from friends such as Minke de Visser (1898-1966) and Christiaan Jörg (1944), both former conservators at the Groninger Museum, when acquiring new pieces.[46] Van Harten-Boers describes Van Diepen as an emotional collector rather than an intellectual one. Van Diepen's collecting practices almost resemble hoarding. Figure 7 shows one of Van Diepen's porcelain cabinets which is filled with stacks of porcelain. While an appreciation for the aesthetics of Chinese porcelain was not uncommon, Van Diepen's collection stood out due to its remarkable scale. Van Diepen wanted his collection to become a part of the Groninger Museum, but that plan did not materialize due to a falling out with the director of the museum. Van Diepen was afraid that his collection would end up in the depot instead of on display for others to admire.[47] Instead, the collection ended up at the Fraeylemaborg in Groningen where it remains today.

[44] Ströber, *Symbols on Chinese porcelain: 10.000 times happiness*, p.13
[45] Van Harten-Boers, *Verzamelaar Jan Menze van Diepen, "Allemaal voor het Algemeen Belang,"* p. 20
[46] Ibid., p. 63
[47] Ibid., p. 87

Both Ottema and Van Diepen collected Chinese porcelain alongside the cultural heritage of the region where they lived. However, it seems that the different subjects formed separate collections and were not combined to form a shared narrative. Whether there are connections needs to be researched further.

Fig. 7 Cabinet stacked with Asian porcelain inside the bedroom of Jan Menze van Diepen, 1992

Maartje Draak, a teacher of Medieval Dutch and Celtic language and literature, possessed a deep passion for both Celtic and Chinese cultures, fueled by her fascination with dragon-related stories.[48] Her last name 'Draak' means dragon in Dutch. Draak started collecting in the 1950-60s and was a regular visitor of antique shops. In 1972, she had the oppotunity to travel to Asia and acquire objects during her journey. Draak's selection of porcelain pieces was guided by the stories they could potentially convey. To unravel an object's narrative, she relied on catalogs and published works to find similar pieces, allowing her to delve into their history.[49] Draak did not mind buying broken pieces if that meant getting a discount since this allowed her to acquire even more objects. Besides porcelain, she also collected Japanese prints, Iranian ceramics, and sculptures from India. Draak stored her collection inside of her house which likely resembled

[48] Scheurleer, "Maartje Draak en de Aziatische Kunst," p. 7
[49] Gerritsen, *Verhalen van een Drakendochter*, p.199

Van Diepen's porcelain cabinet. Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer (1997) described how Draak's house was adorned with objects, covering every available surface.[50] The wide variety of objects that was on display in Draak's house must have presented Asia as a culturally diverse continent. The presence of not only exceptional pieces but also broken objects clearly indicates that the value of the objects was not only their aesthetics but their ability to represent their place of origin.

In 1966, Draak became a member of the VVAK (Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst), an organization that aims to promote the appreciation for Asian arts in the Netherlands. Ottema and Van Diepen were also members of the organization, though Draak was more actively engaged. Draak eventually donated her collection to the VVAK. Thee objects from her collection are currently displayed inside the Special Collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. One of the objects is a Japanese porcelain bowl and the other two are Iranian ceramics.

The three collectors previously discussed have each showcased different motivations for collecting Chinese porcelain during the twentieth century. Ottema concentrated on the historical context and connoisseurship of export ceramics and "Chinese taste" ceramics, including funerary ceramics. Van Diepen's focus primarily revolved around aesthetics, as he curated a diverse array of porcelain styles that appealed to his personal taste. Draak, on the other hand, collected porcelain for its storytelling potential, particularly gravitating towards pieces adorned with figural images like dragons. Her approach can be characterized as ethnographic, employing objects to represent and explore the cultures from which they originated. Despite their distinct motivations, all three collectors have made remarkable contributions to the Chinese porcelain collections housed within Dutch museums. In the subsequent chapters, the contemporary displays of these collections within museums will be examined, aiming to identify any discernible traces of the collectors' perspectives on porcelain. By exploring the presentation and narratives surrounding these collections, we can gain insights into how the collectors' views on porcelain are reflected in the museum settings.

[50] Scheurleer, "Maartje Draak en de Aziatische Kunst," p. 12

PART TWO: CONTEMPORARY DISPLAYS OF PORCELAIN

Part one has discussed how the practice of collecting and categorizing objects was strongly impacted by the ambitions of the collectors. In the context of museums, collections have been separated from their original owners and have been reframed to align with the museum's objectives. Museums objectives are shaped by the collection's history and contemporary worldviews. In the nineteenth century, the rise of nationalist sentiments led many museums to utilize their collections to present a narrative of Dutch history and cultural heritage. Asian objects, including Chinese porcelain, were incorporated into this narrative to highlight the prosperous era of Dutch history characterized by overseas trade.[51] In the twentieth century, colonial and imperial history came to be viewed in a more critical light, necessitating a reinterpretation of the past.[52] The subsequent chapters will assess whether Dutch museums have successfully moved away from Euro-centric and imperialistic narratives in their porcelain displays.

The following chapters are organized into four categories of display, considering aspects such as interior design, the use of texts, content and narrative, and the arrangement of objects within the exhibition space. It is important to note that while each display is assigned to a specific category, it does not imply a rigid classification. Displays often encompass multiple layers of meaning and can transcend a single category. For instance, a display may simultaneously emphasize aesthetics while representing a historical interior. Thus, the categories should be understood as flexible and open to various interpretations.

Each category of display is exemplified through case studies of contemporary displays featuring Chinese porcelain within several Dutch museums. The analysis primarily focuses on display techniques and narrative framing. As every display is unique, certain elements such as lighting or textual information may receive varying degrees of attention. Additionally, considering that the history of a collection often influences its contemporary display in terms of focus and narrative, a brief summary of the provenance of the museum's porcelain collection is provided.

[51] Oostindie, *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage*, p. 24
[52] Ibid., p. 26

Chapter 3. The Historical Interior Display

The historical interior display exhibits porcelain in a setting that reflects the historical period when the collection was originally assembled and displayed. The aim is to present the porcelain in a manner that closely aligns with how it would have been showcased during the time of its collection. These displays create staged experiences that emphasize the life of the original collector, providing insights into how they integrated the porcelain within their interior decor.

The Keramiek Museum Princessehof in Leeuwarden

The Keramiek Museum Princessehof (ceramics museum) is located in the city centre of Leeuwarden. The name Princessehof is derived from the building's history. It used to be the palace of Maria Louise van Hessen-Kessel (1688-1765). She was the wife of Stadholder Johan Willem Friso van Nassau-Dietz (1687-1711). Maria Louise amassed a substantial collection of ceramics, which remain an integral part of the museum's collection. The Keramiek Museum was established in 1917 after the Dutch collector Nanne Ottema (1874-1955) donated his 'Indische Verzameling' to the municipality of Leeuwarden which made the Princessehof available for the display of the collection. Ottema became the conservator of the museum.[53]

The Keramiek Museum owns the largest collection of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands.[54] The collection consists of Asian ceramics, Middle Eastern tilework, and European- and modern-style ceramics. Various display techniques are employed throughout different exhibition spaces within the museum. This section will focus on the presentation of Chinese porcelain in the Nassau dining room. (Fig. 8) The Nassau dining room is the only space within the museum which still retains the historical early eighteenth-century baroque-style interior. The walls are covered in gilded leather, the ceiling is decorated with stucco ornaments and there is a marble chimney mantle with a tall mirror on top. The curtains are blue with gold, which matches the colour palette of the gilded leather. A lacquered cabinet is placed in one of the corners. The Chinese porcelain is arranged on the table as if it were still in use for dining purposes. Additional pieces of porcelain are showcased inside and on top of a wooden display cabinet, and vases are positioned on the windowsills. A singular text panel is provided, focusing on the historical significance of the room, without providing specific information about the Chinese porcelain on display.

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[53]Ottema-Kingma Stichting, "Wie was Nanne Ottema," accessed on 05-07-23, https://www.oks.nl/informatie/wie-was-nanne-ottema

[54] Keramiek Museum Rincessehof, "Over het museum," accessed on 05-07-23, https://www.princessehof.nl/over-het-museum

Fig. 8 The Nassau Dining Room, Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

Fig. 9 Detail of the set table in the Nassau Dining Room of Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden

Most exhibition spaces within the Keramiek Museum have a modern-style display in contrast to the historical interior of the Nassau Room. The museum emphasizes the history of the building by opting for a historical interior. The display in the former palace serves as a reminder to visitors of its historical significance as the residence of the wife of the Stadholder, the most influential figure in the Dutch Republic. The abundance of Chinese porcelain inside the Nassau Room illuminates the close ties between the Dutch Stadholders and the VOC, as well as their active involvement in the trade of luxurious Chinese goods. Willem IV (1711-1751), son of Maria Louise, received the title of Supreme Governor of the Dutch East Indies in 1748, granting him the authority to appoint VOC officials.[55] This newfound authority provided the family with privileged access to the VOC's expansive network, facilitating their acquisition of rare objects. The intentional display of Chinese porcelain within the palace's interior served as a visible expression of the Stadtholder family's power and influence on the global stage.

The Nassau Room itself is notably spacious for a dining room and filled with expensive furniture, suggesting that it must have belonged to a wealthy individual. The gilded leather enhances the overall glamour of the interior. The use of dark blue in the wallcoverings and curtains harmoniously complements the blue and white Chinese porcelain displayed throughout the room, creating a cohesive and visually pleasing atmosphere. The design of the room achieves an aesthetically pleasing presentation while effectively conveying a sense of wealth and refined taste. The inclusion of Chinese porcelain within this display indicates that Chinese porcelain was utilized by the Dutch elite to express good taste and wealth. This narrative is not only expressed through the visual design but also through text. The text panel does not provide detailed information about the individual objects. Instead, it emphasizes the building’s history and connection to porcelain collecting and display practices. Thus, the narrative presents porcelain as a collectable which reflected the taste of the Dutch elite such as Maria Louise.

Within the room, the objects are arranged in a manner that evokes a sense of homeliness and functionality. Taking centre stage is the table, accompanied by six chairs. This focal point not only commands attention due to its central location but it is also accentuated by the chandelier hanging above, which illuminates the entire room. The placement of the objects within the Nassau Room creates an inviting atmosphere, immersing visitors in the ambience of a grand dining setting. The intention is to provide a glimpse into the past while evoking a sense of awe and appreciation for the historical significance of the space. However, the immersive experience is partially disrupted by a red cord that serves as a barrier between the visitor and

[55] Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic colonialism*, p. 139

the room beyond. This physical separation limits the visitor to observing the interior from a distance, preventing them from fully engaging with the space in the same way Maria Louise once did. The staged nature of the display may slightly undermine the immersive quality of the experience, but it does not impact the framing of the porcelain. Although the visitor is not able to approach the table, it is clear that the display means to illustrate that porcelain was also used as tableware by the Dutch elite.

Chinese porcelain is framed in three ways within this historical display. Firstly, porcelain is framed as a rare and value objects which the Dutch Stadholder included in their interiors to express their power and involvement with the China trade. Secondly, porcelain is framed as a luxurious commodity that contributes to the overall decor of the room. However, it surpasses mere decorative value by also serving as a reflection of the owner's wealth, status, and refined taste. Thirdly, porcelain is portrayed as a functional object. By placing the porcelain on the table, the museum frames it as tableware utilized during special dinners, accentuating its practical purpose. The narrative framing positions Chinese porcelain as a foreign commodity that became integrated into Dutch interior and dining customs, illustrating the appropriation of a Chinese object into Dutch cultural heritage. In this framing, the museum narrative implies a power dynamic, suggesting the Dutch's ability to transform and assimilate a Chinese object, thus positioning themselves in a position of power over China.

Museum Paul Tetar van Elven in Delft

Museum Paul Tetar van Elven used to be the residence of painter and teacher Paul Tetar van Elven (1823-1896). Paul Tetar lived in one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Delft and his wealth is expressed through his interior. Paul Tetar bequeathed his home, including the household effects, to the State on the condition that it was to be turned into a museum.[56] The residence has functioned as a museum from 1927 onwards. The collection consists of objects collected or made by Paul Tetar such as paintings, prints, books, antique furniture, Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and Delftware. The interior is meant to give an impression of how the interior looked like when Paul Tetar was still living there. Thus, the furniture has not been removed in order to make space for wandering visitors. Instead, visitors must stay behind a cord and glimpse into a fully furnished room. Besides furniture, the rooms are also filled with paintings which were either made or collected by Paul Tetar. The largest amounts of Chinese porcelain are displayed inside the living- and dining rooms and in the attic. Inside the living room, Chinese porcelain can be seen mounted on the walls and on top of the chimney mantle . Inside the dining room, the porcelain is displayed inside a cabinet and on the dining table. The museum does not use text panels but relies on its volunteers to give interested visitors a guided tour. The porcelain inside the attic is not displayed within a historic setting but in modern glass display cases. Informational texts on the glass windows provide the visitor with more information about the pieces of porcelain.

Visiting the museum feels like entering someone's home if it were not for the reception desk near the entrance. The homely character of the museum is further enhanced by the presence of passionate volunteers that take visitors on a guided tour as if it was their own home. The tour starts with the living and dining room. Here, a similar approach has been applied as in the Nassau room of the Princessehof. The display design is meant to resemble the interior during the life of Paul Tetar van Elven. Inside the living room, Chinese porcelain is displayed on the chimney mantle, attached to the wall above, and displayed in vertical rows between en next to the wondows. (Fig. 10) The display approach is similar to the porcelain rooms of Amalia van Solms and her daughter, Henriëtte Catherina. The emphasis is clearly on the aesthetic presentation of the porcelain which reflects the wealth and good taste of the owner, in this case Paul Tetar. Inside the dining room, the porcelain is placed on the table, just as in the Nassau room at the Keramiek Museum. Here too, the porcelain is presented as tableware. (Fig. 11)

[56] Museum Paul Tetar van Elven, "Het Museum," accessed on 05-07-23, https://museumpaultetarvanelven.nl/NL/het-museum/

Fig. 10 Living Room, Museum Paul Tetar van Elven, Delft (27-01-23)

Fig. 11 Dining Room, Museum Paul Tetar van Elven, Delft (27-01-23)

Fig. 12 Display in the attic, Museum Paul Tetar van Elven, Delft (27-01-23)

Inside the attic, a different display approach is used. The porcelain has been taken out of its historic interior setting and has been put into a space where it is stripped from its context The porcelain is placed inside modern glass display cases accompanied by object labels. (Fig. 12) The labels highlight the cultural exchanges that took place through the medium of porcelain and how this influences its shapes and styles. The labels discus both the Chinese, Japanese and Dutch contexts that impacted the existence of the porcelain object, framing the porcelain as a transcultural object rather than just Chinese or Dutch.

To summarize: Chinese porcelain has been framed in three different ways inside the Paul Tetar van Elven Musuem. First of all, as a piece of interior decoration, secondly as tableware, and thirdly as a transcultural object which is the result of cultural exchanges. The museum has managed to illustrate that Chinese porcelain can have multiple layers of meaning through its diverse display techniques. The two displays on the ground level focus on how Chinese porcelain was appropriated into a Dutch context as pieces of interior decor and tableware. On the other hand, the display in the attic presents Chinese porcelain as an embodiment of cultural exchange.

The Fries Museum in Leeuwarden

The Fries Museum is also located in the city center of Leeuwarden. Its establishment dates to 1881. The Fries Museum has a long history, but its current building was only completed in 2012. The focus of the museum is the local history of the province, and the collection consists of archaeological findings, historical artefacts, paintings, textiles and more. The focus of this section is the display of Chinese porcelain within the Hindelooper room. (Fig. 10)

Hindenloopen is a port town in Friesland which is known for its connection to seventeenth-century international trade routes and its local painting style which was influenced by motifs of imported goods. The painting style dates from the seventeenth century and was primarily used to decorate wooden furniture for the local community. The interior elements of the Hindelooper Room were originally located inside the Eysingahuis in Friesland and were reconstructed inside the Fries Museum in 1880.[57] The interior is not a completely accurate reconstruction but an interpretation of what this kind of interior would have looked like based on remaining examples and memories of Frisian citizens.[58] The walls are covered in wood panels and ceramic tiles which were made in Makkum, Friesland. The tiles are decorated with blue paintings of Dutch scenes. The colour palette is inspired by Chinese blue and white porcelain which was also part of these kinds of interiors. Porcelain is displayed on ledges that have been added on top of the chimney and along the walls. Some porcelain is also displayed inside and on top of a small cabinet that is attached to the wall. The interior also includes other historical furniture such as a table and two chairs that have been painted in the Hindelooper style. Visitors can enter the space but must remain behind a railing. There is an interactive screen which visitors can use to select an object which will then provide the visitor with additional information. (See Fig. 14) Chinese porcelain is included among these objects.

The Fries Museum mainly uses modern-style displays to present different aspects of Frisian history and culture. The historical style of the Hindelooper Room is unique within the museum. The reconstructed Hindelooper Room is located inside a larger exhibition space. Because of this, visitors can also see the outside of the room which consists of plywood walls. There is also a window inside one of the walls so the visitor can look inside and outside the room. While recreating a historical interior, the museum has not attempted to create an immersive experience by deliberately reminding the visitor of being inside a museum. Rather than making visitors feel like they have stepped into the past, the museum wants to introduce

[57] Fries Museum, "The Hindelooper Room," accessod on 05-07-23, https://www.friesmuseum.nl/en/collection/icons/hindelooper-kamer
[58] Ibid.

the Hindelooper style to the public. This case study illustrates how Chinese porcelain has been integrated and adapted into the local interior style, framing it as an essential component of Frisian culture and, consequently, Dutch cultural heritage.

The information about Chinese porcelain that is provided by the digital screen is focused on the Dutch-Chinese trade from the seventeenth century and its impact on the Hindelooper style. The narrative is focused on how Chinese porcelain was used and incorporated into local traditions without providing information about the material's original context. Since Chinese porcelain is used to represent Dutch culture rather than Chinese culture, it can be concluded that the museum presents a Western-centric narrative.

Fig. 13 Hindelooper Room, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden

Fig. 14 Detail of the Hindelooper Room, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden

Museum Bredius in The Hague and Fraeylemaborg in Slochteren

Museum Bredius is located in the center of The Hague. The museum was originally located in the former home of Bredius but was relocated and opened its doors in 1990 at the Langevijverberg 14.[59] The museum houses the collection of art historian Abraham Bredius (1855-1946). Bredius mainly collected Dutch seventeenth-century paintings, but his collection also included drawings, (miniature) silver, antique furniture and Chinese, Japanese and Meissen porcelain. The Chinese porcelain is displayed inside and on top of two cabinets which are located in the dining room and the front room on the first floor. The same spaces display various paintings. There are no text panels that provide the visitor with more information about the objects. The museum relies on an audio guide instead of text panels. The audio guide does not include any fragments about the porcelain.

The same kind of wooden cabinets are used to display Chinese porcelain at the Fraeleymaborg in Groningen. The porcelain collection displayed at the Fraeleymaborg originates from the collection of Jan Menze van Diepen (1905-1994).[60] Van Diepen collected various kinds of porcelain such as *famille verte*, *famille rose*, *Chine de Commande* and blue and white porcelain. These different kinds of porcelain are displayed in separate cabinets. The Fraeylemaborg does not use wall text or object labels either. Instead, it uses an app which visitors can use by selecting the room that they are standing in and an object that attracts their interest. The app then provides the visitor with additional information.

Both the interiors of Museum Bredius and the Fraeylemaborg intend the present a representation of an eighteenth-century interior. The museums utilize antique furniture which is set up in a semi-homely manner to create historical atmosphere. As opposed to the historical displays inside the Keramiek and Fries Museum, museum visitors are allowed to walk around in the exhibition spaces of Museum Bredius and the Fraeylemaborg. This display approach makes visitors experience walking around someone's home rather than a museum space. The absence of text panels also contributes to the experience. Therefore, it is understandable that both museums decided to use an alternative form to inform their visitors about the collection.

The audio guide provided by Museum Bredius only includes fragments about the paintings, Bredius' main interest. The lack of information about the porcelain leaves room for misinterpretation. Visitors who are not familiar with Chinese porcelain could mistake it for Delftware. The absence of information about porcelain reflects the focus of the museum: the

[59] Museum Bredius, "Historie," accessed on 05-07-23, https://museumbredius.nl/historie/

[60] Museum Landgoed Fraeylemaborg, "Jan Menze van Diepen Stichting," accessed on 05-07-23, https://fraeylemaborg.nl/over-ons/jan-menze-van-diepen-stichting/

seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. The porcelain is presented as interior decoration which enhances the homey character of the museum, but it is not presented as individual pieces of art with their own value and meaning.

The Fraeylemaborg app offers multiple narratives about Chinese porcelain through the information provided in the app. The textual narrative focusses on the Dutch East India trade and the creation of new styles and motives to satisfy European tastes. Even though the museum offers multiple narratives, all of them are still concerned with the Dutch impact on Chinese porcelain. Within this narrative, Chinese porcelain is presented as a product of cultural exchange. The Dutch are presented as the initiators of change which expressed the Orientalist notion that the West brought innovation and modernization to a stagnant China.

The various case studies have illustrated that Chinese porcelain is framed in various ways inside the historical interior display. Porcelain is used as aesthetic interior decoration that contributes to the historical atmosphere of the museum space. Secondly, porcelain is framed as a symbol of elitist taste since it is presented inside the former homes of wealthy figures. Thirdly, Chinese porcelain is presented as tableware. Historical displays offer a minimal amount of information through text panels to not interfere with the immersive experience. A solution for this is the use of alternative tools to provide information such as interactive screens, audio guides and an app. The textual information that is provided through these media, places Chinese porcelain within a narrative that is focused on the Dutch context. The texts present the Dutch as active actors who imported porcelain, influenced its design and production, and appropriated it into their own interior designs and dining customs. Therefore, it can be concluded that Chinese porcelain is appropriated into Dutch cultural heritage through historical displays. This means that the discussed museums have been unable to move beyond the imperialist and orientalist representation of China.

Fig. 15 Porcelain cabinet, Museum Bredius, Den Haag

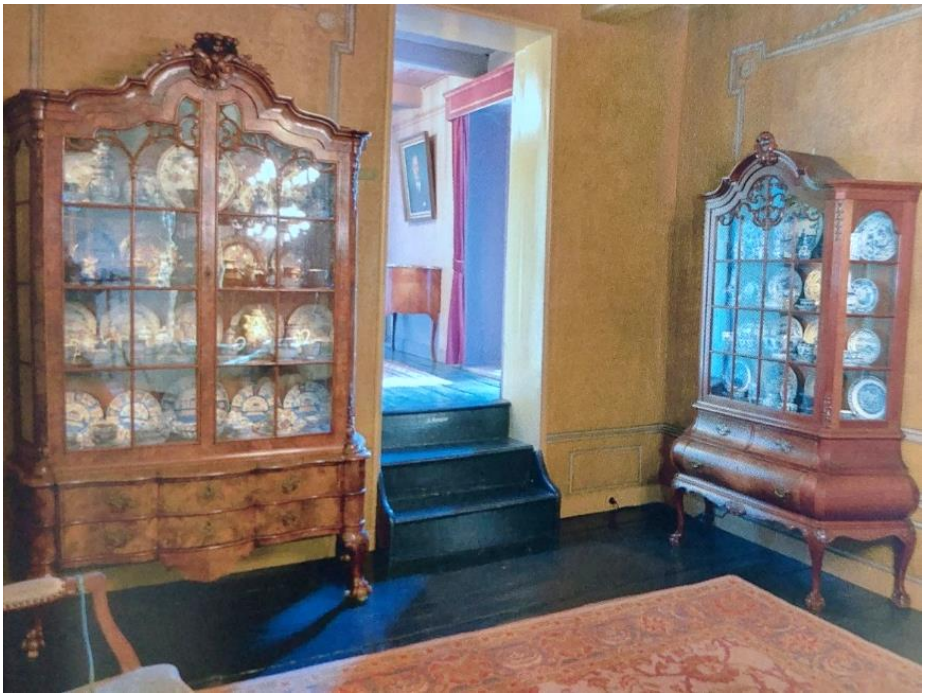

Fig. 16 Porcelain cabinets, Fraeylemaborg, Slochteren

Chapter 4. The Juxtaposed Display

The juxtaposed display is defined as follows**:** Chinese porcelain is juxtaposed with different kinds of ceramics. In the Netherlands, Chinese porcelain is often displayed together with Dutch Delftware, which was inspired by Chinese porcelain in terms of colour palette and motives, or German Meissen porcelain, which was the first successful European imitation of porcelain. This kind of display has the potential to present a contextualized narrative by focusing on versatility, craftsmanship and cultural exchange or it can present an imperialist narrative that frames porcelain as exotic treasures or as artistic inferior objects by creating a hierarchy between different kinds of ceramics.

The Special Collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam

The Rijksmuseum is located in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands. The origin of its collection predates the establishment of the current institution. The collection of the Dutch Stadholder (Willem V) formed the basis of the collection. During the French occupation of the Netherlands from 1795 to 1813, King Louis Napoleon established the National Art Gallery (*Nationale Konst Galleryj*) to represent the cultural heritage of the Netherlands. This concept was continued after the son of stadholder Willem V, Willem Frederik van Oranje-Nassau (1772-1843), returned to the Netherlands and was crowned king. From 1816 onwards, the Stadholder's collection was housed in the Royal Cabinet or Rarities (*Koninklijke Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden*). The Cabinet was disbanded in 1883 and its content was divided over two different museums. Objects of historical significance were integrated into the collection of the Rijksmuseum and ethnographic objects into the collection of Museum Volkenkunde. The Rijksmuseum moved to Amsterdam in 1885, after its new building was completed.

The Rijksmuseum houses an incredibly diverse collection, encompassing paintings, prints and drawings, furniture, ceramics, textiles, statues, and much more. Chinese porcelain can be found within multiple exhibition spaces inside the museum. This section discusses the exhibition space of the Special Collections (0.10) on the ground floor of the museum. The Special Collections consists of multiple spaces which are divided by displays of different categories of objects such as jewels, weapons, musical instruments, Delftware, and Chinese porcelain. Rather than separate rooms, the exhibition spaces flow into one another. The same visual design is applied throughout the Special Collections. The spaces are dark, with black-painted walls and bright spotlights accentuating the objects. Wall texts provide information on

the displayed object categories, while some objects receive their individual labels, though most lack labels altogether.

The atmosphere of the room is dramatized by the contrast of the dark walls and bright spotlights. The combination of the visual design and the seemingly endless amount of exhibition spaces of the Special Collections give the sense of walking into a treasury which has been organized in a similar way to sixteenth-century Cabinets of Curiosity by dividing objects into categories. The versatility of object categories inside the Special Collections expresses the all-compassing nature of the collection and thereby emphasizes the powerful position of the Netherlands. The Chinese porcelain is just one of many examples of foreign rarities that the Dutch were able to collect through their extensive trade network.

Visitors pass displays of Delftware and European porcelain before reaching the display case featuring Chinese porcelain. (Fig. 19) This, perhaps unintended, implication of chronology suggests that Chinese porcelain draws inspiration from European porcelain, rather than the other way around. Since the museum’s master narrative is focused on Dutch history and its artistic production, it seems logical to highlight Dutch Delftware over Chinese porcelain. However, this narrative creates an inaccurate understanding of the development of porcelain and the cultural exchanges that influenced it. The display reflects a Western-centric mindset that views the Dutch as the focal point of the narrative rather than presenting a historically accurate narrative.

Within the display, a small porcelain bowl from Maartje Draak's collection is included. (Fig. 20) It is intriguing to observe how this bowl is being presented in a manner that frames it as a symbol of Dutch imperial power, which contrasts with Draak's own perspective. Draak valued her porcelain collection precisely because it has the capacity to convey narratives about Chinese culture. However, given that Draak's collection is just one of many incorporated into the Rijksmuseum, her personal approach appears to have had a lesser impact on the museum's overarching narrative compared to museums centred around a single collection and owner.

Fig. 19 Special Collections, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (28-05-22)

Fig. 20 Chinese porcelain bowl from the collection of Maartje Draak (bottom shelf, second from the left) (28-05-22)

The Mesdag Museum in The Hague

The Mesdag Museum in The Hague used to be the residence of Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915). Mesdag was a painter who belonged to the Haagse School and collector of European paintings and Japanese porcelain. Mesdag is a unique example of a Dutch collector who preferred Japanese porcelain over Chinese porcelain. The two kinds of porcelain were often collected together because Dutch collectors could not always distinguish the two from each other and aesthetically it didn't matter whether the porcelain was Chinese or Japanese as long as it matched the European view of what Asian porcelain was supposed to look like.

In 1886, Mesdag asked the municipality of The Hague for permission to expand his residence at the Laan van Meerdervoort. The request was accepted and at the right side of his residence a new two-story building was built to house Mesdag's collection of modern art. His residence functioned as his atelier and storage of his personal collection, while the new building served as a semi-public museum which could only be visited on appointment and under the guidance of Mesdag himself.[61] The two buildings are connected by a long hallway. Inside the museum building were two hundred paintings on display, along with arts and crafts items such as earthenware from the Rozenburg factory, Satzuma porcelain, Saxon Porcelain, Japanese and Persian bronzes, and tapestries. Mesdag donated his collection to the Dutch State who took over the responsibilities of the museum in 1903.[62]

There are two places inside the Mesdag Museum were Asian porcelain is displayed. The porcelain is located in both the former Mesdag residence and the museum building. The former residence of Mesdag has three floors. In the hallway of the first floor there are wooden display cabinets which contain a diverse range of Asian objects. One of the cabinets displays Japanese ceramics, samurai helmets, and a sword. A second display cabinet contains ceramics made by Theo Colenbrander (1841-1930). The ceramics by Colenbrander are inspired by Japanese techniques and designs. These ceramics have been placed next to two bronze Japanese firepots, a golden plate, Chinese porcelain bottles and a Chinese bronze basin (Fig. 21). The main exhibition spaces are used to display the paintings, collected and made by Mesdag and his wife. The arrangement of objects within the museum clearly emphasizes the centrality of paintings in the collection, as they are prominently displayed in the main exhibition spaces. In contrast, the cabinets containing Asian objects are positioned in dimly lit hallways, suggesting a secondary level of importance. This division between paintings and arts and crafts objects unintentionally creates a separation between Asian and European artifacts.

[61] Kraan, "De Particuliere Kunstverzameling van H. W. Mesdag," p, 305
[62] Ibid., p. 310

However, the juxtaposition of Chinese and Japanese objects and the ceramics by Colenbrander could be interpreted as an attempt to create a bridge between the West and the East. Colenbrander's work was inspired by Japanese ceramics which implies that he admired the Japanese for their craftsmanship. Colenbrander's work also shows that Europe and Japan share similar aesthetic preferences despite the cultural differences between them. On the other hand, Colenbrander's emulation of Japanese motifs and techniques could be interpreted as an attempt to surpass the skills of the Japanese, implying European superiority. I argue that the former rather than the latter is the case because the European and Japanese ceramics have been placed next to each other in the same cabinet instead of being separated, with one of them having a more prominent place within the display. Within this display, Chinese porcelain is framed as an aesthetic object which inspired European arts and crafts.

On the ground floor of the museum building, there is a Gobelin or tapestry room (Fig. 22). The walls are covered in European tapestries and the interior of the room is filled with Asian arts and crafts (mainly Japanese) objects such as porcelain and bronze. One particular porcelain bowl, showcasing scenes of porcelain production in China, stands out because it has its own dedicated display case (Fig. 23). The reasoning behind its prominent placement within the interior is not explicitly made clear. The single text panel in the room mentions that Mesdag personally acquired Asian objects, which were highly sought after during the nineteenth century. The text ends with this remark: "The collection attests to Mesdag's unfailing eye for quality and craftsmanship". Regarding the Asian objects, the museum decided to focus on the narrative of Mesdag as a collector with a refined taste. Within this narrative, the porcelain is less important than what it signifies: that Mesdag was a sophisticated collector who had excellent taste. Mesdag collected Asian ceramics because of their aesthetic appeal and expression of craftsmanship. This could explain why the porcelain bowl depicting porcelain production, received such a prominent place in the display. The porcelain bowl is adorned with scenes of porcelain production in China, thus highlighting Chinese craftsmanship.

Mesdag's disinterest in Chinese or Japanese culture apart from its skilled artistic tradition could explain why the museum does not provide additional information about the Asian objects. The European paintings and the Asian objects are not treated equally. The object labels of the Asian objects are short; they mention the place of origin, material, and date. In contrast, the labels of the European paintings provide extra information about the artist, the image, and the painting style. The Asian objects are treated as one singular group while the paintings are treated as individual artworks. This reflects an Orientalist framework which is Western-centered and values Asian objects for their aesthetics but not for their cultural values.

Fig. 21 Display case of Asian arts and crafts items and ceramics by Colenbrander, first floor hallway of The Mesdag Museum, The Hague (01-05-22)

Fig. 22 Japanese Room, The Mesdag Museum, Den Haag (01-05-22)

Fig. 23 Bowl with scenes depicting a porcelain factory, Arita porcelain, 1850-1875, The Mesdag Collection, The Hague (hwm0453)

The Keramiek Museum Princessehof in Leeuwarden

This time a different exhibition space within the Keramiek Museum will be discussed. On the first floor of the museum, there is a space which presents an overview of as many variations of porcelain as possible. The display features a composition of white cubes that have been stacked on top of each other. (Fig. 17 and 18) The white cubes vary in size, creating an intriguing visual arrangement. The content of the cubes has been categorized based on material, shape, style, and origin. As a result, Chinese porcelain can be viewed along sides European Earthenware and modern 3D-printed vases. The cubes are numbered and titled according to the category of ceramics that are displayed inside. There seems to be no intent on presenting a chronological or stylistic development.

The towering presence of the large cubes, as they extend above the visitor's head while walking between the rows of display cases, emphasizes the abundance and versatility of ceramics. The white cubes serve as a neutral backdrop, devoid of any specific references to the original time, style, or spatial context in which the porcelain was originally displayed. Consequently, the porcelain is stripped of its contextual associations. Without a specific context to focus on, the material and visual characteristics of the porcelain take centre stage. The display highlights the material and visual differences between the ceramics, drawing attention to their unique qualities. Moreover, the absence of a chronological, geographical, or thematic order in the arrangement implies an equal presentation of all ceramics. The display celebrates the diversity of ceramics without elevating one type above another, promoting an inclusive and egalitarian approach.

The unique display of the Keramiek Museum seems most successful in finding a display style which does not frame Chinese porcelain in a Western-centered and Orientalist manner. The factor that contributes most to this is the absence of a constructed hierarchy or chronology. However, the danger of this kind of display is that it could be interpreted as the presentation of a treasury – because of the museum’s history and connection to the Dutch Royal family who is known to have been actively involved with the China trade and used Chinese porcelain for their own aims. The museum manages to avoid this by adding modern pieces which could not have been collected during imperial times.

Fig. 17 and 18 Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

The three case studies that have been discussed, have illustrated that the visual design and layout of the juxtaposed displays of Chinese porcelain are crucial to determine the direction of the narrative that is being expressed. The visual design of the Special Collections display of the Rijksmuseum presents an imperialist framing of Chinese porcelain as an exotic treasure that was collected by the Dutch as the embodiment of the successful China trade. The layout, which frames the Chinese porcelain as imitations of European models instead of the other way around also reflect a Western-centric mindset.

Mesdag Museum and the Keramiek Museum have illustrated that these Orientalist frameworks can be battled by adding modern and contemporary pieces of ceramics to the displays of Chinese porcelain. These modern objects have no associations with the imperial collections and can instead focus on the artistic exchange and versatility of the medium.

Chapter 5. The Contextualized and De-Contextualized Display

The de-contextualized display focuses primarily on the visual and material qualities of porcelain. There are no or a minimal number of informational texts available to the visitor. This display approach can be used to highlight the aspect of craftsmanship. However, it is important to note that an exclusive emphasis on aesthetics can potentially lead to the fetishization of the objects. Fetishization is a process by which objects within a museum are imbued with excessive or exaggerated value, power, or significance. It involves the transformation of an object into an idol or fetish, attributing it with extraordinary qualities that can evoke intense fascination and desire. In contrast, the contextualized aims to educate the visitor about the different contexts in which porcelain circulated; how was it made, used, and interpreted within China and the Netherlands. This kind of display most clearly attempts to move beyond the Orientalist framework which has dominated the Western perception and presentation of Asia for centuries.

The Keramiek Museum in Leeuwarden

Once again, the Keramiek Museum has applied a different display approach. There is one space inside the museum which is dedicated to Ru porcelain. Ru porcelain is extremely rare: only 68 authentic pieces are known to exist all over the world and the Keramiek Museum is home to the sole piece of Ru porcelain within the Netherlands.[63] The Ru porcelain bowl is placed on a pedestal which is obscured from sight by a semi-transparent curtain. (Fig. 24) In order to see the bowl, the visitor has to move past the curtain, into a smaller more intimate space. (Fig. 25) The fact that the porcelain bowl has received its own individual display contributes to the perception that the porcelain bowl is a precious and almost unattainable artifact, inviting visitors to approach it with a heightened sense of awe and respect.

Initially, this display seems to be an example of fetishization because the object is presented as something extremely rare and desirable. However, the object label and wall text provide further information about its origin and the context surrounding its creation. Ru porcelain was viewed as a rarity in China and therefore also by European collectors. The fact that the Keramiek Museum owns such a rare piece of porcelain expresses the prestige of the museum and its authority in the field of ceramics. This case study illustrates the importance of text because the visual design alone could have been interpreted as the fetishization of the porcelain bowl.

[63] Keramiek Museum Princessehof, "Top Pieces," accessed on 06-07-23, https://princessehof.nl/en/collection/top-pieces/ru-bowl

Fig. 24 Ru ware, Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

Fig. 25 Ru ware, Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden

In 1883, the 'Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden' was closed and its collection was divided over two museums: the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (Museum Volkenkunde) and the Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst (Rijksmuseum). The two museums have different approaches towards displaying their collection. Museum Volkenkunde uses an ethnographic approach which uses objects as representatives of a culture. On the other hand, The Rijksmuseum focuses on 'art objects' by highlighting their visual and material characteristics. How do these different approaches impact the narrative that is being told about the Chinese porcelain on display?

In 1952, the Rijksmuseum had an additional exhibition space built in one of its courtyards. This building was called the Asian Pavilion and was meant to be used for the display of the collection of the KVVAK. The KVVAK is an independent organization which loans its collection to the Rijksmuseum. The Rijksmuseum and the KVVAK have different aims which have influenced the decision-making regarding the display of Asian objects., According to Anette Loeseke and Anna Grasskamp (2015), the Rijksmuseum aims to represents the Dutch national history and identity through the display of its collection. The KVVAK is not concerned with representing Dutch identity but with introducing the Dutch public to objects of Asian art. Export art and household effects were excluded from this category in order to distinguish itself from other ethnographic collections that were already present in other museums, such as the Museum Volkendkunde in Leiden.

The objects in the display of the Asian Pavilion change every 6 months, but the visual design remains mostly the same. The display cases are integrated into the walls of the exhibition space, allowing visitors to walk along one continuous display without interruptions. This arrangement could be interpreted as a linear or chronological development of the narrative. The display cases have a white background and are well-lit, following the white cube approach, similar to the display at the Keramiek Museum. This approach presents objects outside their original context and emphasizes the material and visual characteristics of the porcelain.

Object labels accompany the porcelain, providing information about the depicted motives. During my visit in May 2022, the narrative of the porcelain display focused on female figures on Chinese porcelain and their various identities. While these identities may be clear to a Chinese audience, they are unfamiliar to Dutch visitors. Although the visual design on aesthetics, the textual narrative provides visitors with information to aid in understanding these pieces of porcelain within a Chinese context. Instead of framing the Chinese porcelain solely within the framework of Dutch history and heritage, the museum presents it as a tool to learn

about Chinese culture. In doing so, the museum highlights that porcelain has layers of meaning within China that differ from those in the Netherlands.

In Museum Volkenkunde, Chinese porcelain is showcased within a dedicated section that focuses entirely on the culture of China. Objects are thoughtfully arranged according to themes, resulting in the display of porcelain alongside other types of Chinese objects such as paintings and religious sculptures. The objects are housed in glass cases with a dark background, and the lighting is subdued, with gentle spotlights illuminating the objects. Through a combination of dim lighting and accompanying music, the museum aims to create an atmosphere that immerses visitors in the experience of Chinese culture. This sensuous experience present Orientalist stereotypes by highlighting the foreignness and exoticness of the Chinese objects through music and lightning.

The groups of objects are accompanied by a text that explains their commonalities. Some examples are porcelain from imperial kilns, porcelain depicting symbols of luck and porcelain that was made on order for European clients. Additionally to these texts, visitors can use a digital screen to select the individual objects in the display cases for extra information. The texts that are provided discuss the significance of porcelain in Chinese culture as well as its role in Dutch-Chinese trade relations. Thus, Chinese porcelain is framed as a representative of Chinese culture and the embodiment of Dutch-Chinese exchange.

Surprisingly, the display of the Asian Pavilion of the Rijksmuseum, a museum focused on art, seems to have been more successful in moving beyond the Orientalist narrative than Museum Volkenkunde, a museum focusses on representing foreign cultures. The narrative that is being expressed in the Asian Pavilion is meant to teach the visitor to view Chinese porcelain not only as an aesthetic object but also as objects that are imbued with cultural meaning. The museum display makes the visitor aware that different viewpoints can change the understanding of an object. Musuem Volkenkunde presents porcelain in the context of Chinese culture as well as the exchange between China and the Netherlands. However, the sensory display methods, such as dramatic lighting and music, frame Chinese objects as foreign and exotic. This is likely the result of the history of the collection. Ethnographic collections were established during a time when the Orientalist worldview prevailed and the display approaches from this period still resonate in the contemporary display.

Fig. 26 Asian Pavilion, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (28-05-22)

Fig. 27 China display, Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden (23-02-23)

CONCLUSION

Early display practices were strongly impacted by the intentions of collectors and object categorization, while contemporary displays are shaped by the master narrative of the museum. The previously discussed case studies have illustrated how different master narratives have impacted the display of Chinese porcelain in various museums.

Museums with historical interior displays present a narrative that is focused on the history of the collection and its original owner. Often, the porcelain is displayed, or rather staged, in a setting that is meant to recreate the original display setting from the time that the porcelain was first collected. Chinese porcelain can be framed in multiple ways inside historical settings: as a piece of interior decoration, as tools to express wealth, status, and good taste, as a tool to express imperial power, and as tableware The case studies have shown that Chinese porcelain was appropriated into a Dutch context. Chinese porcelain was taken out of its original context and used to start new local interior traditions. This narrative puts the Dutch owners in a position of power, allowing them to redefine a foreign object to fit its new, local context.

Within juxtaposed displays, Chinese porcelain is displayed alongside other ceramics, providing an opportunity to showcase the diversity of ceramics worldwide. This narrative presents various ceramics, including Chinese porcelain, as equals. However, when divisions based on geography, chronology, or theme are present, unintentional hierarchies can emerge. If displays of European ceramics are highlighted more than Asian ceramics, it can express a sense of superiority rather than mutual exchange. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to the layout of ceramics to avoid unintended implications. The Rijksmuseum Special Collections' display, for example, reflects its nationalist and Orientalist history, implying European superiority.

Unexpectedly, no museum seems to have used a de-contextualized display which only focusses on the visual characteristics of Chinese porcelain. Visual design still tend to present Chinese porcelain as exotic and aesthetic objects devoid of context, however, the textual framing often nuances the presentation by highlighting the context surrounding the Chinese porcelain. Many museum attempt to create a contextualized displays but sadly still present narratives that express Orientalist and Western-centered ideas. The Rijksmuseum and Museum Volkenkunde, while having visually distinct displays, have both successfully used their textual narratives to highlight the multiple layers of meaning that porcelain can accumulate with different contexts.

Before starting this research, I expected to see a big difference between large, and internationally renowned museums and smaller, lesser-known museums due to the varying budgets and the presence of specialists focused on the de-westernization of museum displays. Small museums in the Netherlands tend to focus on a single historic figure. In these cases, the porcelain is framed in a similar manner as in the past. Therefore, these displays often express outdated, Orientalist sentiments about Chinese porcelain. Museums offer different amounts of information about their porcelain collections and when they do, they often focus on the impact that Chinese porcelain had on Dutch trade, material culture, and interior design. There is still much room for improvement and the availability of technology such as interactive screens, audio guides, and mobile apps make it possible to create better textual information sources without disrupting the historical interior.

Larger museums have shown to experiment more with different kinds of display approaches within different spaces of the same museum. The case studies have illustrated that this has resulted in varying degrees of success. The Special Collections of the Rijksmuseum, for example, is the most obvious example of a display which expresses a Western-centric and imperialist view of Chinese porcelain. However, the porcelain display inside the Asian Pavilion does manage to present Chinese porcelain in a more nuanced framework which highlights the cultural meaning of porcelain in China. The contrast is striking, and I wonder if it has been done on purpose to showcase the nationalist history of the museum and simultaneously its attempts to move forward.

Overall, it is apparent that old Western-centric and Orientalist approaches to displaying and framing Chinese porcelain still resonate in many contemporary museum displays. Many museums offer additional information about Chinese porcelain without making the visitor aware of how past worldviews have impacted their narratives. Museums should recognize their role in creating knowledge and shaping people's perceptions of the world. It is their responsibility to raise awareness of the Orientalist and imperial frameworks that have shaped and still shape our understanding of the world around us.

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Fig. 17 Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

Fig. 18 Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

Fig. 19 Special Collections, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (28-05-22)

Fig. 20 Chinese porcelain bowl from the collection of Maartje Draak (bottom shelf, second from the left) (28-05-23)

Fig. 21 Display case of Asian arts and crafts items and ceramics by Colenbrander, first floor hallway of The Mesdag Museum, The Hague (01-05-22)

Fig. 22 Japanese Room, The Mesdag Museum, Den Haag (01-05-22)

Fig. 23 Bowl with scenes depicting a porcelain factory, Arita porcelain, 1850-1875, The Mesdag Collection, The Hague (hwm0453), https://www.demesdagcollectie.nl/nl/collectie/hwm0453

Fig. 24 Ru ware display, Keramiek Museum, Leeuwarden (08-04-23)

Fig. 25 Ru ware, Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden, https://www.princessehof.nl/te-zien-en-te-doen/tentoonstellingen/van-oost-en-west

Fig. 26 Asian Pavilion, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (28-05-22)

Fig. 27 China display, Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden (23-02-23)