Analysis of Chinese Art Display in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Leiden's Wereldmuseum

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1. Introduction

Since its origin museums have fulfilled important roles in society as purveyors of knowledge. Through the organization collection, the museum can tell stories and create knowledge to educate visitors (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 2, 20, 75). There are different 'types' of museum that have different goals with regards to the knowledge they want to share. The national museum for instance aims to create knowledge about the evolution of a nation and its arts and culture to stimulate a sense of national identity, create national pride and justify colonialism and imperialism (Berger 2015, 16; Levitt 2015, 6). The ethnographic museums collect and display artefacts from around the world, to educate the public about different cultures. At the time of founding, the goal was to entertain visitors with a 'spectacle of others' and educate visitors by contasting 'civilized' European culture with 'uncivilized' non-European cultures (Bouquet 2013, 72; Coombes 1988, 57).

In both the national and ethnographic museum, colonialism is an important factor in the original goal of the museum. The Netherlands has not colonized China but hasa long history of relations with China, mainly since trade with China by the Dutch East India company (Steenbergen 2008, 5). Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the question of how Chinese art is displayed in Dutch museums. Specifically in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam's Asian Pavilion and Wereldmuseum Leiden's China exhibition. These two museums were chosen because these are two different types of museum, a national art museum versus an ethnographic museum. This means that the goals of the museums are different, and this thesis will also examine how this infleunces the way the museums display Chinese art.

1.1 Methodology and Structure

This thesis aims to gain better insight in Chinese art display practices in the Netherlands. This is done through comparative case studies of the Asian Pavilion in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, and the China exhibition in Wereldmuseum Leiden. A comparitive case study of two different types of museums in The Netherlands will allow for both a general understanding of how Chinese art is displayed in the country, and more specficically how the museum type affects this. Chapter 1 of the thesis provides a literature review of four main themes that play a role in the case studies. First, the is a discussion on the origins of the museum. This starts with Aristotle, and evolves to the former residence of Confucius, European churches and monasteries in the Middle Ages, to the cabinets of curiosities, and eventually the public museum after reform in the nineteenth century (Abt 2006, 115-6; Su 1995, 63; Alexander and

Alexander 2008, 3-5; Bennett 1995, 24). This establishes a basic understanding of what a museum is and what the goals of original iterations of museums were. Second, is national (art) museums. This subchapter looks at the goals of national museums and functions as a foundation for the case study of the Rijksmuseum. It addresses the emergence of the national museum in the late nineteenth century, their role in fostering national identity, and their role in justifying colonialism (Berger 2015, 15; Anderson 2006, 6; Levitt 2015, 6). Third, is ethnographic museums. As foundation for the case study of Wereldmusem Leiden, this subchapter looks at literature regarding the evolution of the ethnograhic museum. This starts with human zoos in the late 1800s which leads to the establishment of ethnographic museums in the early nineteenth century, and finally addresses (critiques on) decolonization in ethnographic museums (Jovanovic-Kruspel 2021, 223; Bouquet 2013, 64). Fourth, is the displaying of Chinese art in Western museums. This functions as a foundation for specific analysis of the two case studies' display of Chinese art. This regards the spatial arrangement in the museum, the focus on antiquity, and how the way the items is displayed decontextualizes it and turns objects into museum pieces, omitting their cultural context (Levitt 2015, 6; Lee 2016, 359; Carbone and Wang 2020, 1; Poulot 2015, 97; Wang 2021, 733).

After the literature review follow the two case studies. First the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and the Asian Pavilion and second Wereldmuseum Leiden and the China exhibition. Both case studies are analyzed following the same systematic method. First, is the history of the museum. Here literature of the respective case study will be compared with arguments from the literature review. Second, is the architecture of the museum. Museum architecture is not necessarily seen as something that defines the museum, but it is nevertheless an important aspect of studying a museum as it has an interwoven connection with the museum as an institution (Jones and Macleod 2016, 215). Third, is the sequence of exhibtion. This is to show how the layout of exhibits influence the overall narrative of the museum. Fourth is displayed objects and their labels. As due to time and word limit constraints not all displayed works can be analyzed, a selection will be made focusing on the most representative and, or, noteworthy. Following the case studies, there will be a comparative analysis to understand how these Chinese items are displayed in general in The Netherlands, and specifically the respective museum types.

There are certain limitations to this methodology. One limitation is that the interpretation of the exhibitions and Chinese art display practices is mainly informed by existing theories that might not cover all specific aspects of the case studies, and have not covered opinions or arguments by museum professionals. However, my position as researcher, rather than a museum insider such as a curator, also offers an advantage. Observing museum practices from a distance and with a critical eye can provide fresh insights and new perspectives.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

To analyze how the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Wereldmuseum Leiden display Chinese art, it is important to explore existing history, concepts, and theories. To do this, this literature review first examines the origin of museums, then more specifically the origin of national and ethnographic museums as these two types of museums describe the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Wereldmuseum Leiden respectively. A key aspect of this topic is why these types of museums were established, what goal they were meant to achieve, and how these museums have acquired their collection. This information will later be used to analyze how and why a respective museum displays Chinese art in a certain way. Lastly, the literature review looks at the current academic literature on the way Chinese art is generally displayed in Western museums. This ranges from curatorial practices, and exhibit design, to how artworks are specifically displayed within an exhibit.

2.1 The Origins of the Museum

Collecting and displaying objects has been happening worldwide for over two thousand years (Kreps 2006, 457). As far back as 477 BCE, an early form of what would later be known as a 'museum' opened in Confucius' former residence in the town of Qufu, China (Su 1995, 63). This 'museum' displayed Confucius' clothing and musical instruments and functioned as a Confucianist temple of worship (Su 1995, 63). Despite the global longstanding tradition of collecting and displaying items, the term 'museum' as we understand it now is a Western concept. The etymology of the term 'museum' traces back to Aristotle around the mid-340s BCE, with the ancient Greek term *'mouseion*' referring to a temple dedicated to the muses, in which systematic categorization and study of objects took place (Abt 2006, 115-6). Starting with botanical specimens under Aristotle, the museum turned into a place to categorize and display curiosities collected during expeditions all over the world in the age of discovery (Bennet 1995, 24). In the Middle Ages, European churches and monasteries categorized and displayed objects collected during Crusades (Alexander and Alexander 2008, 3-5). These were socially exclusive spaces, only accessible to well-connected individuals (Bennet 1995, 24; Alexander and Alexander 2008, 3-5).

The closest prototype to the museum as we know them now, are the cabinets of curiosities, that originated in the sixteenth century (Bouquet 2013, 64). Cabinets of curiosities, also called Wunderkammers or Kunstkammers, are rooms with private collections of nobility and

prominent figures, that bring the entire universe into one ‘cabinet’ by collecting and systematically ordering miscellaneous objects from across the globe (Boursiquot 2014, 64). The cabinet of curiosities bridged a gap between the limits on acquiring new scientific knowledge imposed by religion, and scientific rationality (Pomian 1990, 77-8). This means that the objects in the cabinets offered new knowledge to visitors, but this knowledge was based on objects collected and organized based on curiosity, lacking scientific methodology (Pomian 1990, 77-8). Similarly to the Middle Ages, displayed objects came from European conquests overseas, namely during the European colonization of other continents (Boursiquot 2014, 64). The objects rarely accurately displayed local culture or the activities of the colonists, but rather showed either the success of a ruler in influencing his colonies’ culture or juxtaposed the ‘exotic’ and ‘uncivilized’ colony against civilized Europe (Spenlé 2011, 2; Maurice 1985, 23; Collet 2007, 335). However, the overarching goal behind the collection was to display the prestige and power of the owner, they were status symbols (Effert 2008, 14). In the nineteenth century museum reform took place which brought about two main changes. Firstly, the museum was made a public rather than private space (Bennett 1995, 24). Secondly, exhibitions should aim to educate visitors rather than just evoke wonder and entertain. The public museum got the task to make civilized behavior more widespread in European society (Bennett 1995, 24). The educational reform was done by, like in the cabinet of curiosity, displaying the collection in a way to create an image of a ‘civilized’ unitary national public, which was offset against ‘uncivilized’ and ‘primitive’ colonial subjects (Bennett 1995, 79).

2.2 The National (Art) Museum

The first case study of this thesis, the Asian Pavilion, is situated in Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands’ most prominent national art museum. The emergence of the national museum in the latter half of the nineteenth century coincided with the rise of the nation-state, illustrating the close interconnection between these emerging concepts (Berger 2015, 16; Macdonald 2003, 1). The national museum was founded to not only educate and entertain the public, but also to cultivate a sense of national identity and foster a national public (Macdonald 2003, 1-2).

The cultivation of national identity is thoroughly discussed in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), in which Anderson introduces the concept of the 'imaged community'. Anderson (2006, 6) argues that the nation is an 'imagined', as citizens feel part of a nation through a shared national identity, despite not having met most fellow citizens. The national museum is one of the tools that contributes to the creation of the imagined community through the cultivation and display of a shared national identity. The national museum, together with the census and map, showed which people groups are part of the nation, and what the nation-state stands for through its collections (Anderson 2006, 184; Levitt 2015, 6). It displays the nation's masterpiece, documents, and documented important national events, and uses these to tell the story of the nation. This is done either by displaying the evolution of the nation itself, or the evolution of its arts and culture (Anderson 2006, 184; Levitt 2015, 6).

Levitt (2015, 7) argues "Museums not only created nations but also justified their imperialist projects." And indeed, not everything in the national museum comes from its nation. In nineteenth-century Europe, objects from colonies were prominent in national museum collections (Berger 2015, 16). The inclusion of non-national art collection served three main purposes. Firstly, the ability to collect and display objects from other cultures showed the greatness of the nation through their ability to govern and create knowledge (Berger 2015, 15; Macdonald 2003, 3). Secondly, imperial or colonial collections not only justified imperialist projects, but also often displayed objects from high civilizations such as Greek and Roman, appropriating these cultures as their own (Levitt 2015, 6; Berger 2015, 17). Thirdly, non-national collections in the museum overall played a role in creating a sense of national pride, which was achieved by comparing the greatness of the nation compared to another (Berger 2015, 16).

In the Netherlands, colonial and imperial collections were not as prominent in national museums during this period (Berger 2015, 23). Rather than expanding collections of national museums, the Netherlands was the first country to establish a dedicated colonial museum with the Tropenmuseum established in 1926 (Apor 2015, 48). The Tropenmuseum, translating to tropics museum, displayed the 'special' ethnography of the Dutch colonies, and told a story which portrayed the Netherlands as colonizer as the enlightened savior that came to the rescue to improve the lives of its colonial subjects (Apor 2015, 48). The museum disregarded opinions of colonial subjects and ignored any negative influence the Dutch had on its colonies (Apor 2015, 48).

2.3 The Ethnographic Museum

The second case study of this thesis is the China exhibition of the Wereldmuseum Leiden, an ethnographic museum. Ethnographic museums have a scientific origin as they display ethnography, the universal study of humankind. The popularity of the scientific ethnographic museum originates from the human zoo in the late eighteen hundreds (Jovanovic-Kruspel 2021, 223). In Human Zoos, indigenous communities were put on display to perform their culture in front of a Western audience (Jovanovic-Kruspel 2021, 223). The human zoo incited interest into the study of peoples and their cultures, resulting in the establishment of the field of ethnography, the scientific study of peoples and their cultures, or the universal study of humankind (Jovanovic-Kruspel 2021, 224). Observing differences between Europeans and 'others', namely Indigenous peoples, showed Europeans as superior and the others as primitives (Jovanovic-Kruspel 2021, 223-224). Following the increasing interest in ethnography, ethnographic museums emerged in the early nineteenth century, (Bouquet 2013, 64). The ethnographic museum aimed to both educate and entertain the public (Bouquet 2013, 72). Additionally, viewing the exhibition served to create a sense of superiority and national unity among the visitors by contrasting themselves with the 'primitive' displayed cultures, diverting attention from national issues (Bouquet 2013, 72; Coombes 1988, 57).

These issues of representation and collection are indicative of the aforementioned cabinets of curiosities from the sixteenth century, which also gathered diverse objects from foreign cultures to create a 'spectacle of others' (Boursiquot 2014, 64). Yet, there are significant differences between the two. The cabinets of curiosity aimed to collect the strangest objects from around the globe to learn about the beginnings of the world (Boursiquot 2014, 65). On the other hand, the goal of ethnographic museums is scientific, aiming to preserve, classify, and study objects created by humankind and nature (Boursiquot 2014, 65). The ethnographic museum employed various methods to tell visitors about the importance of certain objects (Jacknis 1985, 95). The last, and perhaps most influential difference, is the fact that the ethnographic museum was public, whereas the cabinets of curiosities were private (Jacknis 1985, 95). The ethnographic museums aimed to educate and entertain the larger public rather than a select group of privileged citizens. Over the years, ethnographic museums built up extensive collections of objects from different cultures to study. Although anthropologists moved to study intangible concepts such as meaning and cultural dynamics only available through fieldwork ethnographic museums remained relevant due to their impressive large

collections of special objects (Boursiquot 2014, 95). Objects displayed in cabinets of curiosities or ethnographic museums were mostly acquired during geographical explorations or colonization (Braunholtz 1953, 90; Coombes 1988, 57; Bouquet 2013, 72). This makes that the ethnographic museum's collection displayed what the collector, colonist, or explorers wanted people to know about foreign cultures, providing a flawed view of cultures which compromises the educative mission of the ethnographic museum (Levitt 2015, 3).

Ethnographic museums are still present in the twenty-first century and have in recent years self-reflected on the history of their museums and collections as debates about modernization of the ethnographic museum through decolonization have emerged (McAuliffe 2021, 678-9). Discussed ways of 'modernization', or decolonization, for the ethnographic museum include for instance repatriation of select objects, moving ethnographic objects to national art museums transforming the objects into art, and historical contextualization (Bouquet 2013, 90). Academic literature is however critical of the 'modernization' of ethnographic museums. Bouquet (2013, 90) for instance argues that ethnographic museums are still nineteenth-century institutions as modernization has proven to be difficult. Whilst discourse about decolonization and modernization of the ethnographic museum is present, the execution of modernization lacks persistence. Many modernizations merely concern word use and discourse rather than repatriation, which has become a geopolitical and economic issue between states, hindering progress in decolonization (Wang 2021, 732; McAuliffe 2021, 678-9). Implemented modernization in ethnographic museums merely include language changes such as 'ethnographic' to 'world cultures' (Wang 2021, 732).

The museum changed its goal in the 1990s to telling the story of the historical development of non-Western cultures, together with the consequences of Dutch colonization or contact with non-Western cultures (Apor 2015, 48). In 2023, the museum changed its name to Wereldmuseum Amsterdam (world museum) and merged with the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam and Wereldmuseum Leiden (Wereldmuseum Leiden 2024). Looking at Wereldmuseum Leiden and decolonization, the museum as mentioned changed its name, but also changed the names of its exhibitions from 'ethnology' to 'world cultures'. The museum, whilst minimal, has also made a start with repatriation of objects back to their original home. In 2023, the museum repatriated objects that were looted or taken under duress during Dutch colonization to Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Wereldmuseum Leiden 2023).

2.4 Displaying Chinese Art in Western Museums

As the focus of this thesis is Chinese art displayed in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and Wereldmuseum Leiden, it is necessary to contextualize the displaying of Chinese art in Western museums.

This starts with the location of the art within the museum, or the distribution of different types of art and their amount of 'real estate'. In this case 'real estate' refers to the fact that the division of square footage for different exhibits shows the priorities of the museum. Levitt (2015, 7) brings forward an example from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, where Greek, Roman, or Egyptian exhibits are prominently located, whereas the Africa,Latin America, or Asia exhibits are more difficult to locate. Scholars made observations about the spatial arrangements of Non-European or Asian art displays: Non-European exhibits, including Asian art, are often grouped by geographical area, (Lee 2016, 359). This is in contrast to the chronological and integrated display of Western art, this way the non-European exhibits are excluded from the chronological development of arts and culture (Lee 2016, 359). Within the Asian art exhibits, a large number of objects from different cultures are often grouped closely together which creates the perception that these cultures share certain commonalities (Lee 2016, 359). This way, Asian cultures are often times essentialised through a limited, heterogenous, selection of objects, mainly focussed on antiquity and tradition, which are displayed as representing entire artistic cultures and periods (Lee 2016, 359; Carbone and Wang 2020,1).

A closer look at Asian art displays shows that the objects on display often were not created as art, but are turned into art (Lee 2016, 359). This concept is explored by several scTheholars, with Poulot (2015, 97) arguing that the museum takes objects out of their original context to transform them into 'special pieces'. More in-depth, Wang (2021, 733) describes the phenomenon with the term muséographie of white cube'. Museums display their objects in well-illuminated 'white cubes', this is exemplified by rooms with tall ceilings, white walls, and display cabinets, with small non-outstanding labels (Wang 2021, 733). This method was originally designed for displaying modern art, to ensure pure focus on the art, not its surroundings (Wang 2021, 733). However, by doing the same to non-modern art exhibits, the museum removes the displayaed sobject from its original context, omitting its cultural, religious, or colonial history (Wang 2021, 733). Clunas (2004, 42) uses the example of the throne of the Qianlong Emperor from 1770, which is displayed in the British Museum, to

illustrate the concept of transforming an ethnographic object into art. To turn the throne into art, the throne must not be sat on, or bowed down to anymore (Clunas 2004, 43-4). The arguments made by Wang (2021) and Clunas (2004) fall under the overarching terms of decontextualization, recontextualization, delocalization and recolalization. Delocalization constitutes the prcess of moving an object from its original to a new location, and relocalization consitutes the subsequent change in meaning of this moved object in its new location. Decontexualisation and recontextualization brings the arguments by Lee (2016), Poutlot (2015), Wang (2021), and Clunas (2004) together. The terms describe the overarching process of extracting an object from its original society or culture(decontextualization), and consequently moving it into a 'strange' context where it is displayed in a museum (recontextualization (Etienne, Charpy, Estebanez, 2014, 1).

Grasskamp and Loeseke specifically argue that the Asian Pavilion of the Rijksmuseum can only be understood when compared to its neighboring galleries in the main building of the museum. The permanent exhibitions in the main building form the grand narrative of Dutch history; the Asian Pavilion, despite displaying Asian art objects, further enforces the Dutch grand narrative as its display is curated to Dutch taste and largely comes from the private collection of the Dutch Royal Society of Friends of Asian Art. Therefore, they argue that until changes are made, the Asian Pavilion should be renamed as "The Dutch-Asian Pavilion" (2015, 242).

The literature review established that despite the global longstanding tradition of collecting and displaying items, the term 'museum' as we understand it now is a Western concept originating with Aristotle, and evolving into the public museum in the 1800s (Su 1995, 63; Abt 2006, 115-6; Alexander and Alexander 2008, 3-5; Bennett 1995, 24n). The public museum had the task to provide entertainment, and also make civilized behavior more widespread in European society (Bennett 1995, 24). The last point was achieved by offsetting a 'civilized' unitary national against 'uncivilized' and 'primitive' colonial subjects (Bennett 1995, 79). Following the public national museum, the national museum was founded to perpetuate a national identity, which is done by showing which people are part of the nation, and displaying the evolution of the nation and its arts and culture (Anderson 2006, 184; Levitt 2015, 6). The literature shows that the ethnographic museum became popular after the increasing interest in studying ethnography following the popularity of the human zoos in the late 1800s. Like in the human zoos, the ethnographic museum entertained and educated

visitors by create a sense of superiority and national unity among the visitors by contrasting themselves with the 'primitive' displayed cultures (Bouquet 2013, 72; Coombes 1988, 57). Current literature is critical about the self-reflection of ethnographic museums regarding decolonization, argueing that most changes regard word choise rather than repatriation (Wang 2021, 732). Regarding the display of Chinese objects in Western museums, scholars agree that non-European exhibitions are often in a self-contained bloc excluding them from the global evolution of arts and culture the museum displays. Chinese culture is also often essentialised through a heterogenous selection of objects, mainly focussed on antiquity and tradition (Lee 2016, 359; Carbone and Wang 2020,1). The way the items are displayed decontextualizes them, as their original cultural context is removed, in order to display them as art (Levitt 2015, 6; Lee 2016, 359; Carbone and Wang 2020, 1; Poulot 2015, 97; Wang 2021, 733). Existing literature on the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion by Grasskamp and Loeseke (2015) argues that the Asian Pavilion should be renamed as "The Dutch-Asian Pavilion" as it depicts Dutch history in Asia rather than Asian art.

Rather than focussing on one issue, this thesis aims to take a step back and see how the different factors discussed in the literature review together challenge the narratative museums want to tell. In the case of this thesis, this regards the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion and the Wereldmuseum Leiden's China exhibition.

Chapter 3. Rijksmuseum and the Asian Pavilion

This chapter examines how Chinese art is displayed in the Asian Pavilion of the Rijksmuseum. The Rijksmuseum is perhaps the most prominent national museum of the Netherlands, displaying an vast collection spanning multiple centuries. The Asian Pavilion is a newly constructed building solely dedicated to displaying Asian art and opened in 2013 following an extensive renovation of the Rijksmuseum. The chapter firstly begins by providing and analyzing the history of the Rijksmuseum and the Asian Pavilion. Secondly, the KVVAK is examined as M=many of the art on display in the Asian Pavilion is on permanent loan from the KVVAK. Thirdly, Chinese art display in the Asian Pavilion is analyzed by following the structure laid out in the methodology. First, the architecture and design of the Rijksmuseum and Asian Pavilion are analyzed. Secondly, the sequence of exhibitions is analyzed. Thirdly, the displayed artworks and their description is analyzed. This all leads to answer the research question: how Chinese art is displayed in the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion

3.1 History of the Rijksmuseum

In nineteenth-century Europe, multiple countries started opening national museums to create a (cultural) nation and identity through the display of national history (Bergvelt 2024, 67). In the same period, the Rijksmuseum was established in the Netherlands. According to the Rijksmuseum itself, it was established as a national museum inspired by the French museum model, with as its goal to create a sense of patriotism (Rijksmuseum 2024b).

The French model of the national museum originates from the Napoleonic era, with national museums tasked to display France’s imperialist ambition and success. The Louvre and the Musée de St. Germain-en-Laye are the strongest examples of this model (Berger 2015, 21). The Louvre was founded with the goal of displaying France’s imperial ambitions, displaying not only art but also war trophies (Berger 2015, 21). The Musée de St. Germain-en-Laye aimed to display France’s imperial roots, displaying antiques and important documents from the Roman and Gallic empires, tracing France’s history back until Charlemagne (Berger 2015, 21).

However, rather than displaying historic objects, the Rijksmuseum to this day displays an overview of Dutch artistic history and development to "tell the story of 800 years of Dutch history, from 1200 to now" (Rijksmuseum a; Bergvelt 2024, 67). The initial collection came from the personal collections of stadholders and national institutions such as the Dutch East India Company (Rijksmuseum 2024c).

The collection moved to the Royal Palace on Amsterdam's Dam Square in 1809 and the collection was merged with the collection of Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum c). The museum got its current name, Rijksmuseum, in 1813 after King William I renamedz it and moved the museum around multiple times (Rijksmuseum 2024c). In 1876 construction started on its current building (Rijksmuseum 2024c). The museum received many critiques in the nineteenth century, mainly surrounding the fact that the Rijksmuseum in its first decades prioritized artistic value over historically important objects (Bergvelt 2024, 65-6). Furthermore, the museums for a long time did not arrange its exhibits chronologically and did not portray developments in Dutch history as the museum prioritized art over history (Bergvelt 2024, 66). After large renovations to the museum in 2013 this changed, and the mission of the museum since then is to provide new meanings in art and history to a diverse audience with a focus on Dutch art and history but in including Asian and European art and history as well (Rijksmuseum 2024c).

3.2 Koninklijke Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst and the Asian Pavilion

When looking at the museum labels of the artworks displayed in Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion, it stands out that many artworks are on loan from the KVVAK, the Koninklijke Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst. This association was founded in 1918 in The Hague, with the goal of stimulating the appreciation for Asian art (Scheurleer 2008). This started the appreciation, collecting, and research expeditions of Asian art in the Netherlands relatively late compared to other European countries which is surprising due to the Netherlands' strong ties with Asia through colonialism and trade (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 1). Instead of Asian art, colonial administrators preferred to bring back furniture, and fabrics rather than local art (Steenbergen 2008, 5). Chinese and Japanese ceramics were the only art objects regularly brought to the Netherland, as they were trade objects for the Dutch East India Company (Steenbergen 2008, 5).

KVVAK's first (board) members consisted of collectors, professors, and mostly people who had experience with the culture of the Dutch East Indies through being colonial administrators or made their fortune in the Dutch East Indies (Scheurleer 2008). One of these first board members is Jan Willem Ijzerman (1851-1932), who worked on the construction of several railways in the Dutch East Indies as part of the Dutch military and was involved in the merger of the petroleum company 'Moeara Enim' or the Batavian Oil Company (Veenendaal Jr., 2013). Additionally, IJzerman became a member of parliament concerned with colonial mining affairs (Veenendaal jr., 2013). Residing on Java in Indonesia, Ijzerman became interested in Hindu-Javanese antiquities and their conservation (Veenendaal jr., 2013). Another example is Geert Vissering, whose career in the Dutch East Indies started in 1906 as president of the 'Javasche Bank', which was responsible for currency of the Dutch East Indies (de Hen 2015). After his time at the 'Javasche Bank' Vissering became the president of the Dutch Central Bank (de Hen 2015). Donating members of the society including for instance C.J.K. van Aalst, the president of the Netherlands Trading Society (Steenbergen 2008, 8-9). The Netherlands Trading Society was founded in 1824 as an initiative by King William I after the Dutch East India Company ceased to exist (FTM 2024). The Society continued trade with Dutch colonies, mainly with the Dutch East Indies, and in the nineteen hundreds turned towards banking operations still focused on Southeast Asia (FTM 2024). The first president of KVVAK was Mr. Herman Karel Westendorp, who earned his money working for his family's asset management firm and was an avid collector of Asian art (Fitski 2013, 73-5). At the time of founding, in the appreciation for Asian art for (board) members of KVVAK aesthetics played the most important role. Considered more important than scientific research, "it was about art, not ethnography" (Scheurleer 2008).

That many of the first (board) members of the KVVAK have strong connections to Dutch colonization, and the prioritization of aesthetics over scientific research have a strong influence on the collection of the KVVAK. The collection therefore reflects the taste of colonial administrator or trader, who as we say in the literature review were often educated in the ethnographic museum to view the local population and culture of colonies as inferior and uncivilized in order to justify colonialism (Bouquet 2013, 72; Coombes 1988, 57). The strong connection with colonial administrators and money made from colonialsim also raises questions about the ethics of the funding of the KVVAK, as the money made by colonial administrators and businessmen was mostly at the cost of the local population. Furthermore, the prioritization of aesthetics over scientific research and ethnography can led to

decontextualization and commodification. Objects not made to be artworks are collected and consequently taken out of their cultural context and recontextualized as museum piece (Bouquet 2013, 72; Wang 2021, 733).

3.2.1 KVVAK in the Stedelijk Museum

The KVVAK wanted to establish an Asian art museum in the Netherlands. To achieve this, a fund was set up in 1928 for members to contribute to the acquisition of Asian art for a museum within Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Scheurleer 2008). The largest donations to the society came from German collectors who came to the Netherlands after World War I (Steenbergen 2008, 9). This included for instance the controversial German banker Eduard Baron Von der Heydt, who became out was one of the financers of the Nazi regime and remained a donater to recompense for his actions in WWII (Steenbergen 2008, 9). In total the amount raised for the acquisition fund came to 158.000 Dutch guilders in 1930 after which two members set out on an acquisition trip in Europe and Asia (Steenbergen 2008, 11). In Asia, acquisitions were made in Indonesia, Indochina, and Japan and the emphasis in acquisition was to acquire works of art made in and for the country of origin and were regarded highly locally, rather than utilitarian and export objects that saw no value in their country of origin (KVVAK 2024). Acquisitions included over seventy works in Japan, four Khmer sculptures in Indochina, and a large bronze 400-300 BCE Chinese bell (Scheurleer 2008). In 1930 and 1931 the KVVAK acquired several Ming dynasty Chinese scroll paintings (Rijksstudio 2024a/b/c/d/e). Acquisitions continued back in Europe after the trip, including a Ming dynasty Chinese scroll painting in Amsterdam in 1932 (Rijksstudio 2024f). Furthermore, a twelfth-century bronze Shiva statue was acquired in 1935, and the Chinese wooden sculpture of Guanyin in 1939 (Scheurleer 2008).

Following successful acquisitions, the society collected enough art to open the Museum of Asian Art in the Stedelijk Museum (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 2). The organizers knew that a complete art historic overview of Asia was too large of an ambition, and it was thus decided that the museum would aim to exhibit the highlights of their collection (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 2). The curator of the exhibition called it "Pearls in a chaos of lacuna", an exhibition with certain unique high-quality ‘pearls’ surrounded by unimportant pieces in a chaotic space (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel,

2). This shows the exoticization and acquisition practices of the KVVAK. For a pearl to become part of for instance jewelry, it has to be forcefully removed from its context, the shell of the oyster or mussel. Is the statement by the curator therefore an admission of strong decontextualization of acquired artworks? Adding to this, the pearls are located in a 'lacunas' according to the curator (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 2. A lacuna refers to an empty space or gap, which means that the curator admits that merely a small amount of the displayed collection is actually of value for them, whereas the majority is of no importance and value.

3.2.2 KVVAK in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The KVVAK decided to look for a larger location to display their collection after World War II and ended up at the Rijksmuseum where the collection of the society could be put on display in the west wing of the museum. (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 3). KVVAK's Museum of Asian Art remained an independent body within the Rijksmuseum until 1972, when the society's collection went on permanten loan to the Rijksmuseum and merged with their Asian art collection (Van Campen, Wang, and Van Der Poel, 2). In 2013 the Asian Pavilion opened. There was a negative aspect to moving to the Asian Pavilion, as there is significantly less space than before. Yet, this gives provided the possibility to organize curated themed exhibitions (Rijksmuseum 2008).

In short, the KVVAK is a private society founded in 1918 aiming to stimulate the appreciation for Asian art. The association has been largely successful in achieving its goal. They have managed to amass a large collection of Asian art through contributions from members and have exhibited these works in various locations. Their efforts have resulted in the establishment of a permanent exhibit with the Asian Pavilion at the Rijksmuseum. There are however some critiques on their collection (practices). The colonies ties of the KVVAK raise questions about the origins of the funding of the society. Also, the prioritization of aesthetics over scientific research leads to decontextualization of objects in order to turn them into museum pieces. The curator's description of the exhibition in Stedelijk Museum as 'pearls in a chaos of lacuna' exemplifies this.

3.3 Exhibit analysis

This subchapter examines how Chinese art is displayed in the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion. This is done by following the structure laid out in the methodology. First the architecture and design of the museum is analyzed, looking at how this influences the way Chinese art is displayed. Second, the sequence of exhibitions is analyzed to see the role of the China exhibit in the overall narrative of the museum. Third, the displayed objects are analyzed. As not all objects can be analyzed, the most representative and noteworthy objects of the exhibition are analyzed. Taking into consideration the information gathered and analyzed, this chapter aims to answer the question of how Chinese art is displayed in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam's Asian Pavilion.

3.3.1 Architecture and Design

The Rijksmuseum moved into its current building in 1885, which is designed by renowned Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers with the aim to celebrate the greatness of the Dutch nation (Rijksmuseum 2024c; van Os 1996, 310). The architectural style of the building is a mix between gothic and renaissance and includes numerous patriotic symbolisms and inspiration from the Middle Ages (Figure 1; Rijksmuseum c). The new Rijksmuseum was however met with large amounts of criticism as people thought the architecture was too much inspired by the Middle Ages and Catholicism, and therefore not Dutch enough (Rijksmuseum c). The Asian Pavilion is a lot newer as it finished construction in 2013, and it is located in between the main building and the Phillips wing (figures 2 and 5). Its exterior mostly consists of Portuguese natural stone, with strong edges and straight walls (Figure 2; Zonneveld 2012). In terms of architectural style, it purposely does not resemble Asian architecture but is rather more practical in trying to fit the building in a relatively small space (Zonneveld 2012). The decision to build the Asian Pavilion was made during the renovation process, as Asian art did not fit into the plan of having all permanent exhibitions in the main building (Zonneveld 2012). The Asian Pavilion is purposely designed in a vastly different style than the main building of the museum to create a sense of transition of surroundings when entering the Asian Pavilion (Fitski, Slaczka, and Southworth 2013).

The interior of the Asian Pavilion is minimalistic with clean white walls and a light wooden floor, this minimalistic design draws attention to the art rather than its surroundings. This is

similar to the ‘muséographie of white cube’ discussed by Wang (2021, 733) which refers to how art is displayed in this style to put the focus on the art, not the surroundings (figure 3). This removes the displayed object from their cultural, religious, and historical context, reducing them to just an aesthetic artwork (Wang 2021, 733). This removal of context can be clearly seen comparing the display of a Guanyin sculpture in the Asian Pavilion, versus in a temple in China (figures 4 and 5).

Figure 1. Front façade of the Rijksmuseum. (Rijksmuseum d).

Figure 2. Outside view of the Asian Pavilion (Duccio Malagamba).

Figure 3. Asian Pavilion room A2 (Joost Kamp, November 2023).

Figure 4. Guanyin sculpture in the Asian Pavilion (Joost Kamp, November 2023).

Figure 5. Guanyin sculpture, Lingyin temple in Hangzhou, China (Armin Kübelbeck).

3.3.2 Sequence of Exhibitions

Visitors in the Rijksmuseum start in the auditorium (figure 4), from here visitors follow the route starting in room 0.1 to 0.13. The Asian Pavilion is not within this route as it is located in its own building. Therefore, visitors have to turn left at the auditorium and follow a long halfway to reach the Asian Pavilion (figure 4). The Asian Pavilion consists of two floors, the ground floor (room A1) houses the Indian and Indonesian collection as these objects cannot be damaged by the sunlight that enters this floor (Fitski, Slaczka, and Southworth 2013). In the backside of room A1 are the stairs that lead down to room A2 where the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collection is displayed. The exhibition sequence of the Rijksmuseum connects with the argument by Levitt (2015, 7) that the amount and location of 'real estate' art receives shows the priority of the museum. There are some small exceptions in the Rijksmuseum where Asian art is present in other exhibits outside the Asian Pavilion, such as a 'model of the island of Deshima from 1850-1851 in 1.17, but most Asian art is grouped together in the semi-detached Asian Pavilion (Rijksstudio 2024 g). This disconnect between the Asian Pavilion and the main building creates the image that Asian art is not a part of the narrative of the evolution of arts and culture the Rijksmuseum displays. The layout and

sequence emphasizes the otherness of non-European arts and culture, presenting them and their evolution as disconnected from European culture (Bouqet 2013, 32; Coombes 1988, 57). This can also contribute to the Eurocentric narrative that non-European arts should be seen as curiosities rather than as part of the shared worldwide evolution of arts and culture (Berger 2015, 181).

Before analyzing the objects individually, it is beneficial to know the different displays and rooms displaying the China collection. Room A2 of the Asian Pavilion has multiple displays cases and rooms. The China collection is displayed front half of room A2 which you enter first when walking down the stairs (figure 8). Directly in front of the stairs is a display case with a sculpture of Guanyin with functions as the center point of the China collection (figure 9). Directly right of it is a room displaying Yixing teapots and European imitations. The right outer wall is lined with four Buddhist sculptures from China and Japan (figure 13). Left of the Guanyin is a display case following the length of the wall, displaying several types of art chronologically (figure 3). The left outer wall sees a display with tomb figures from c. 650-750 CE. Across the Guanyin, under the stairs, is a room displaying copperplate engravings made by Matteo Ripa as court painter to Emperor Kangxi (1661-1722). Left of this room is a display case with Indonesian jewelry. This overview of what the Asian Pavilion displays, shows that the exhibition has a strong focus on European-Chinese relations in the exhibition.

Figure 4. Map of the Rijksmuseum, with a red tag at the Asian Pavilion (Rijksmuseum).

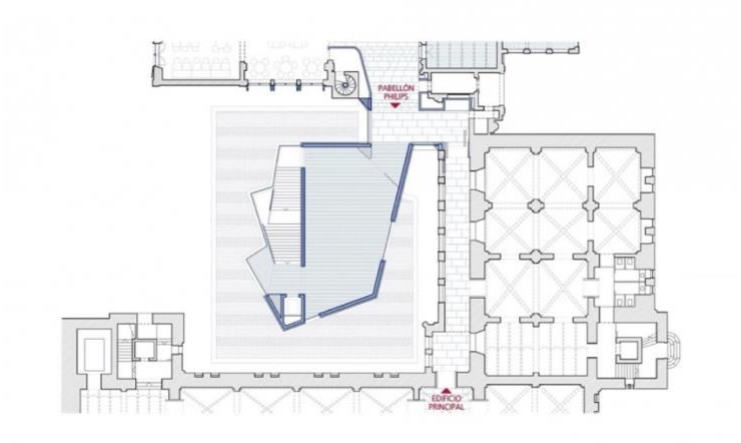

Figure 7. Floorplan of the Asian Pavilion's Ground Floor, Room A1(Asian Pavilion Colored Blue) (Cruz y Ortiz arquitectos).

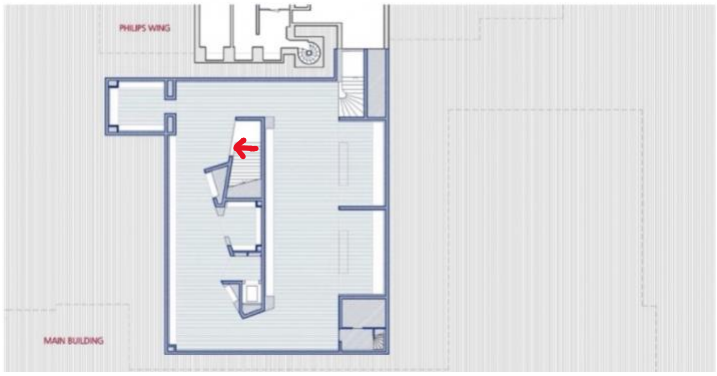

Figure 8. Floorplan of the Asian Pavilion's Underground Floor, Room A2 (Asian Pavilion Colored Blue) (Cruz y Ortiz arquitectos).

Figure 9. Entrance to room A2 of the Asian Pavilion (Joost Kamp November 2023).

3.3.3 Analysis of Displayed Chinese art

Through an analysis of displayed objects, this subchapter analyses how Chinese art is displayed in the Asian Pavilion, especially considering the mission statement of the Rijksmuseum, which is to provide new meanings in art and history to a diverse audience, and the Asian Pavilion's China, Japan, Korea exhibition which aims to provide visitors with an impression of the multifaceted and high-quality applied arts of China, Japan, and Korea in the 'treasury' which they call the Asian Pavilion (Rijksmuseum 2024c). As a large part of the displayed collection is on permanent loan from the KVVAK, their vision to collect fine art objects that are also highly considered in their original context, will also be taken into consideration in the analysis. As is not possible to analyze all displayed Chinese art the most representative and noteworthy artworks of each section will be picked.

3.3.3.1 Guanyin

In room A2 of the Asian Pavilion the large wooden sculpture of Guanyin first catches your attention. Its label mentions explains that the sculpture from the 12th century depicts the Buddhist deity Guanyin and is savior for people in peril. Additionally, the label and information card describe the pose of this Guanyin, and its aesthetic details. There however is important historical information about the sculpture missing in the display. The sculpture was crafted in the 12th century, and for centuries it was used to worship the deity Guanyin, during this time it was restored several times in order to maintain it (Lorne, Rösch and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 384-5). Western interest in Chinese Buddhist sculptures rose in the 19th century whilst simultaneously interest in Buddhism declined in China (Lorne, Rösch, and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 384-5). Following this trend a bustling art market developed in Beijing in the late 18th century (Lorne, Rösch and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 380). Objects were often taken non-consensually or under duress from all over the Chinese countryside and sold in Beijing to Western customers. Most art ended up in Paris, London, New York, and Berlin. Whilst locals appreciated the money they could make selling cultural artifacts, they overall opposed the looting and selling as they believed in the sanctity of the artifacts (Larson and Kerr 1985). This sculpture of Guanyin was sold in Beijing to a dealer in Berlin from who the KVAKK acquired the piece in 1939 (Lorne, Rösch and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 380). The history of the sculpture of Guanyin is omitted in the museum, both in the label and in the multimedia tour which both merely describe the sculpture.

The way the Guanyin is displayed continues the omission of its history. The sculpture is displayed in a text-book example of the ‘white box’ (Figure 12; Wang 2021, 733). It is known that this Guanyin was originally bought in Beijing in the 1920s and most likely came from a Buddhist temple. Since its removal from the temple and entering the art market the Guanyin has been delocalized and decontextualized. Comparing the way the Rijksmuseum’s Asian Pavilion is displayed, with an example of a Guanyin in its original context (figure 5) shows how the Rijksmuseum’s Guanyin has been relocalized and recontextualized into a museum piece, omitting all cultural and religious context.

Figure 12. Guanyin in the Asian Pavilion (Joost Kamp, November 2023).

3.3.3.2 Lohan

On the right side of the Guanyin, is a row with Buddhist sculptures from China and Japan against the wall (figure 13). The first sculpture on the left is a sculpture of a Chinese luohan (also known as arhat) dating back to the 12th century (figure 14). Its label explains that Luohans are followers of Buddha that have achieved enlightenment but not yet Nirvana (heaven) and live a hermit life in the mountains. This is one of 18 luohans, Ajita, who concentrates fully on listening to Buddha’s teachings. The sculpture was bought by the KVVAK in 2005 from a Dutch Asian art dealer. (Rijksstudio 2024h). As with the sculpture of Guanyin, the history of this sculpture is omitted. In terms of provenance, it is only certain that in 2004 it was sold in Hong Kong. However, like the Guanyin it is suspected to have entered the art market in the early 20th century, when the an art market developed in Beijing. During this time numerous religious objects were looted or taken under duress from the

countryside to be sold in Beijing (Fitski 2013, 27; Lorne, Rösch, and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 384-5). Through delocalization and decontextualization, the Rijksmuseum has taken this sculpture of luohan from its original cultural and religious context in a Chinese Buddhist temple Etienne, Charpy, Estebanez, 2014, 1). In the museum it is displayed in a minimalist 'white box' setting, which removes the cultural and religious significance and context of the sculpture and transform it into a fine art and a museum piece (Wang 2021, 733; Clunas 2004, 43-4).

Figure 13. Row of Buddhist sculptures in the Asian Pavilion (Joost Kamp, 2023).

Figure 14. A luohan. (Rijksstudio 2024).

3.3.3.3 Two guardian figures

In front of the room with copperplate engravings stand two Chinese guarding figures from c. 618- 906 CE (figure 15). The label of these two figures tells us that they originally guarding the entrance of a Chinese tomb. Due to the decoration of the figures in colored gaze the tomb must have belonged to a prominent citizen. Finally, the label mentions that the bodies of both figures come from the same mold, and only the faces were modeled individually. The two figures belong to the KVAKK collection, who received it from a bequest from Dr. Adriaan van Rossum, a professor of neuropathology. Throughout the entirety of Chinese history, funerary rites have been of strong cultural importance. Deceased would be buried with grave gifts, such as these two guardian figures, would assist the deceased in their afterlife. The type of grave gift differed throughout time. During the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the period of the two guardian figures, graves of people from with a certain stature could by law be accompanied by couples of soldiers, civil servants, or supernatural beings. The two guardian figures are examples of soldier guardian figures (Kamstra 2008, 72-3).

Guardian figures such as these offer valuable insights into the life of the affluent and influential in their time period (Kamstra 2008, 73). However, the two guardian figures were not made to be in the museum but consciously created to guide deceased people in the afterlife. This begs the question of whether they belong in a museum, especially a foregin national museum. That the provenance of the two guardian figures in the Asian Pavilion is not provided in the museum underscores the importance of this question as it is not known under what circumstance the guardian figures were delocalized. This issue of decontextualization is further perpetuated by the display following the white box muséographie (Wang 2021, 733).

Figure 15. Two guardian figures in the Asian Pavilion (Joost Kamp, 2024).

Figure 16. Two guardian figures (Rijksstudio 2024).

3.3.4 Conclusion

The Rijksmuseum aims to dispay the evolution of arts and culture, and provide new meaning in art and history. The Asian Pavilion's China, Japan, Korea exhibition aims to showcase the high-quality applied arts of China, Japan, and Korea (Rijksmuseum 2024c). However, three main issues to these missions appear after the analysis.

First, calling the Asian Pavilion a 'treasury' symbolized the otherness and exoticization of Chinese art. Separating the Asian Pavilion from the main building suggests that Chinese art is not part of the global evolution of arts and culture, reinforcing a eurocentric narrative that sees non-European art as curiosities instead (Berger 2015, 181).

Second, most of the Asian art collection is on permanent loan from the KVVAK, this influences the display to reflect the (colonial) Dutch collectors' taste rather than the evolution of Chinese art. The colonial ties of the KVVAK are not mentioned in the museum whilst this history has a strong influence on the collection, and raises ethical questions about its funds.

Third, the prioritization of aesthetics over cultural and historical contexty decontextualizes the displayed art, turning them into museum pieces. The sculptures of Guanyin and luohan for instance lack proper reference to their cultural context and provenance. Their labels rather focus on aesthetics of the art.

In sum, to answer the research question, Chinese art in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam's Asian Pavilion is displayed in a way that emphasized otherness and exoticization. This is exemplified by using the word 'treasury' to descibe the Asian Pavilion. Influenced by the KVVAK, the collection displays the taste of Dutch collectors rather than the evolution of Chinese art, and the displayed Chinese art is decontextualized through the prioritization of aesthetics over cultural context, and omits acquisition history and cultural context.

Chapter 4. Wereldmuseum Leiden and its China Exhibition

The Wereldmuseum Leiden is the second case study in this thesis, and this chapter will provide an in-depth analysis the museum and its China exhibit. First, the history of the Wereldmuseum will be described and analyzed. Second is the analysis of the China exhibit by following the structure laid out in the methodology. First, the architecture and design of the museum and China exhibit are analyzed. Second, the sequence of the exhibits in the museum is analyzed. Third, is the analysis of the displayed artworks and their description. As the exhibition features 210 objects, not all can be analyzed and therefore there will be a focus on the most representative and, or, noteworthy of the exhibition. Taking into consideration the information gathered and analyzed, this chapter aims to answer the question of how Chinese art is displayed in the Wereldmuseum Leiden's China exhibition.

4.1 History of the Wereldmuseum Leiden

The Wereldmuseum Leiden was founded in 1837 as the National Japanese Museum Von Siebold, after collector Philipp Franz von Siebold (Wereldmuseum 2024). Von Siebold started his career as a docter in the Dutch East Indies in 1923 but he fell ill after just four weeks (Effert 2008, 119). Von siebold was a also a scientist with a strong interest in natural history, he therefore was sent to Japan to research its natural history to strenghen Dutch-Japanese trade relations instead (Effert 2008, 120-1). During his visits to the Shogun's court, he also collected ethnographic objects (Effert 2008, 120-1; van Gulik 1989, 379). As a trained surgeon, Siebold provided free medical services to Japanese citizens, improving his relationship with citizens and the Japanese government which granted him more freedom in Japan. As payment, patients gifted Siebold botanical specimen and ethnographic objects for his collection, with he all accepted and observed with equal interest (van Gulik 1989, 380-1).

Siebold returned to the Netherlands and in 1837 sold his collection to the state, but under the condition that his collection would merge with the Royal Cabinet of Rarities to form a general ethnographic museum (van Dongen, Forrer, and van Gulik 1987, 1). The colleciton was arranged in the new 'National Japanese Museum von Siebold' (van Gulik 1989, 383). Von Siebold's objective was to establish a general ethnographic museum. Through a scientifically and systematically organized collection of objects from non-European countries, visitors of the museum would learn about the state of their arts, culture, science, agriculture, and trade by comparisons between different countries and cultures. The museum

specifically focused on countries the Netherlands had either colonized or had strong trade relations with and aimed to provide both entertainment and education. Additionally, colonial officers or tradesmen could visit the museum to learn about the country where they were going to work (Effert 2008, 138-9). This aligns with arguments from the literature critiquing the reinforcement of colonial narratives (Berger 2015, 181; Bouquet 2013, 32). The comparative method often perpetuated European perspectives seeing non-European cultures as uncivilized reinforcing a hierarchal view of world cultures. Additionally, the task of the museum to educate colonial administrators underscores how the knowledge created in ethnographic museums was used to continue colonization (Effert 2008, 138-9).

The National Japanese Museum von Siebold changed its name to the National Museum of Ethnography in 1864. Conradus Leemans, director of the museum, argued that they needed to continue collecting products of foreign cultures to establish a general ethnographic museum. This museum would include all non-European peoples, which Leeman saw as uncivilized peoples. Leemans aimed to display the collection scientifically organized, whilst simultaneously attractive, to make the museum both entertaining and educational for visitors (Effert 2008, 176). Under Leemans the colonial narrative of European superiority and focus on entertainment resulting in sensationalized and unequal representation therefore persisted and perhaps increased. Lindor Serrurier was appointed as conservator in 1877 to help Leemans with his work in the museum and became the director of the museum in 1881 (Effert 2008, 203). Under the tenure of director Serrurier, J.J.M de Groot asked for a mandate and funds to purchase new objects for the museum in Fujian in 1885 (Werblowsky 2002, 57).

4.1.2. J.J.M de Groot

J.JM. de Groot (1854-1921) significantly impacted the collection of the museum. Trained as a sinologist at Leiden University, de Groot spent a year in Xiamen, Fujian province, China, studying the language and local ‘folk religion’ rituals which was his biggest passion. In 1982 he became a Chinese language interpreter for the government of the Dutch East Indies. During this period, he published a book about the annual religious feasts in Xiamen. De Groot did his research by direct participation in local religions. This new method made him the founder of ethnographic sinology. In 1986 he revisted Xiamen to study Fujian’s ethnography and folk religion. And despite not getting the mandate from Serrurier, he also collect Daoist and Buddhist ethnographic objects with funding from acquainted book and antique dealers. In Xiamen, de Groot commissioned two Fujian Pantheons from local god-

carvers and acquired. Acquisitions were sent back to the Netherlands and were purchased by Serrurier and by the Guimet Museum in the 1890s, where they are still present in their collections. In this period de Groot was the sole Westen scholar and collector interested in Chinese folk religion and is the forefather of ethnographic sinology. Nevertheless, de Groot had problematic views regarding European superiority. De Groot refused to even consider marrying Dutch-Japanese woman. And despite giving praise to Chinese culture, in the beginning of his book de Groot mentions that the study of foreign cultural practices belongs to superior races like Europeans (Werblowsky 2002, 57-83).

4.1.3 The National Ethnographic Museum and the Royal Cabinet of Rarities

In the same period, the collection of the national ethnographic museum was expanded with a majority of the collection of the closing Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1883 (van Gulik 1989, 389). The Royal Cabinet of Rarities was established in 1816 by King Willem I (1772-1842), following a tradition of art and natural science collections since Stadtholder Willem IV (1711-1751). Between 1814 and 1815, R.P. van Kasteele wrote a plea to establish a new public royal cabinet, which would display folk art, with the goal of displaying the greatness of the Dutch nation compared to others (Effert 2008, 14-23). This is precisely in line with and illustrates the arguments made by scholars such as Levitt (2016), Berger (2015), Bouquet (2013) and Coombes (1988) that the nineteenth-century ethnographic museum often perpetuated European perspectives on non-European cultures by emphasizing European superiority against ‘uncivilized’ non-European cultures and justifying colonization.

In 1814 the Royal Cabinet received 437 Chinese objects bequested from Jan Theodore Royer (1737-1807), a lawyer and amateur sinologist and collector. Currently, three objecsts collected by Royer are on displayed in Wereldmuseum Leiden (Rassers 1937, 60; Wereldmuseum Leiden 2024a/b/c). Royer’s collection and R.P. van Kasteele’s plea together initiated the establishment of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities, with van Kasteele as director. Van de Kasteele kept the same goal for the museum as in his 1814-1815 plea, to create a general ethnographic museum to entertain and educate visitors on world cultures. The educational aspect of the museum was severly flawed as the collection displayed what the Dutch collector, colonist or explorer wanted people to know about foreign cultures (Effert 2008, 22-32; Levitt 2015, 3). Additionally, van de Kasteele, aligning with academic

literature, aimed to achieve the educational aspiration of the museum by contrasting the greatness of the enlightened Dutch compared to others. (Effert 2008, 23).

Due to a need for more space, the National Ethnographic museum moved into the old academic hospital in Leiden in 1933 (van Dongen, Forrer, and van Gulik 1987, 3). Two years later the museum changed its name to 'Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde', with 'Volkenkunde' being a more modern version of the term 'ethnology' (Rassers 1937, 60).

4.1.4 Decolonization

Following decolonization worldwide, ethnographic museums have started to self-reflect on their position in society and the world, and the history of their museum and collection. For Wereldmuseum Leiden this self-reflection initiated in the 1960s under director Dr. Pieter H. Pott. According to Pott the Wereldmuseum was never a colonial museum, but regardless he communicated in the annual report of 1960 two possible pathways for Wereldmuseum Leiden in the decolonizing world (Berger 2021, 84). Firstly, the museum could display only non-Western art and focus on the aesthetic value. Secondly, the museum could transform into a 'true ethnographic museum', displaying positive attributes of different cultures and get rid of preconceptions (Berger 2021, 85-6). Pott chose for the latter and aimed for the museum to teach visitors about foreign cultures. To achieve this, the focus of acquisitions shifted to household objects, and he changed the acquisition guidelines, the original context of an acquired object had to be known and could not be taken from a 'living culture' if its irreplaceable or essential for the local culture (Berger 2021, 87, 91-2). For Pott, decolonization in the ethnographic museum merely encompassed changes in display, not repatriation of objects or political debates in the museum (Berger 2021,88).

On October 4th 2023, the museum again changed its name, from Museum Volkenkunde to Wereldmuseum Leiden. This went together with a larger change as the museum merged with the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal to constitute the Wereldmuseum together. The name change went together with a change in mission. The new mission statement of the museum Wereldmuseum's together is to shows what its like to be human, and how humans are connected to one another and the world (Wereldmuseum Leiden 2023b). Earlier in the year the museum returned objects that were looted or taken under duress during colonization back to Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Wereldmuseum Leiden 2023a).

4.1.5 Conclusion

In sum, a brief overview of the expansive history and development of the Wereldmuseum Leiden shows the many changes the museum has gone through. Since its founding as the National Japanese Museum von Siebold, the goal was an ethnographic museum that collected and displayed its collection scientifically. However, what was considered scientific also meant comparative ethnography displaying the 'uncivilized' non-Europeans to highlight the superiority of the 'civilized' European cultures. The museum absorbed a large part of the Royal Cabinet's collection which had the same goal. Self-reflection about the museum as colonial institute started in the 1960s and have mostly concerned word-use inline with the argument of Wang (2021, 732). In 2023 decolonization efforts became more influential with the return of objects, looted or taken under duress during colonization, back to Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

4.2 Exhibition analysis

This subchapter examines how the Wereldmuseum Leiden displays Chinese art. This is done by following the structure laid out in the methodology. First the architecture and design of the museum is analyzed. Secondly, the sequence of exhibitions is analyzed. Thirdly, the displayed objects and their description are analyzed. As there are 210 objects on display in the China exhibit, the most representative and noteworthy objects of the exhibition are analyzed.

4.2.1 Architecture and design

The Wereldmuseum Leiden, as mentioned, moved into the former academic hospital in Leiden in 1937. The building was designed by architect H.F.G.N. Camp in the French neo-renaissance style, or renaissance revival, and opened in 1870 (Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken). The classic brickwork with stone details together with the grand façade of the building, characterized its symmetrical proportions, ornate details and large windows display grandeur

(Figure 17). The classic and grand architectural design of the building matches the historical importance of the museum.

Figure 17. Wereldmuseum Leiden exterior. (Joost Kamp, 2024).

The exhibit rooms inside the museum do not carry the same design, but follow a modern minimalistic, and dark aesthetic through the use of dark flooring, walls and spotlights rather than general overhead lighting (Figure 18 and 19). The display cases follow the same design, with a black backdrop, and spotlights. This creates a similar situation like the ‘muséographie of white cube’, where museums display theire objects in well-illuminated ‘white cubes’ which removes objects from their original context, omitting the religious or cultural history (Wang 2021, 733). In the case of the Wereldmuseum it however is a black instead in which the objects are displayed (figure 19). Despite the different color, it is the same concept as the ‘white cube’ as displayed objects such as the Daoist mountain (figure 18) have been taken from their original context, and are put on display in a neutral display case with the objects being well-illuminated. This removes them from their original context, a buddhist temple and grave respectively and puts a focus on the objects’ aesthetic.

Figure 18. China exhibition at Wereldmuseum Leiden. (Erik van B, 2017).

Figure 19. Wereldmuseum Leiden China exhibition. (Joost Kamp, 2024).

4.2.2 Sequence of exhibitions

After entering the museum, you start in the central hall on floor 0 (Centrale hal) from which you can go three directions. On the left-side is the Asia exhibition, and on the right-side the Indonesia exhibition. Visitors can also immediately go up the stairs in the central hall to floor 1. On floor one there are also three directions to go. Left is the North pole and North America exhibition, straight ahead is the ‘big hall’ and on the right is the Japan and Korea exhibition. To reach the China exhibit, visitors first have to enter and pass through the Japan and Korea exhibition (Figure 20, with an orange arrow pointing towards the China exhibit). This

sequence of exhibits, where the Japan and Korea exhibition, and China exhibition are grouped together in close proximity can create a perception of cultural homogeneity in East Asia (Lee 2016, 359). Whilst grouping regions together is logical, the layout at hand here where visitors have to walk through one exhibit to get into the other can create this perception of cultural homogeneity and overstate shared affinities (Lee 2016, 359). Additionally, whilst not on the map, the Easter Islands exhibition is within the China exhibition (Figure 21). The Easter Islands are in geographically Oceania, and there is an exhibit dedicated to Oceania, therefore the fact that the display is within the China exhibit can be read as out of place, and as attempt to fill up open space, or as lack of space in the Oceania exhibit. Regardless of this, it reads as out of place and careless, especially as there is no bridge between the China and Easter Island exhibit. This contributes to the generalization of the 'exotic other' which the ethnographic museum originally aimed to display and wanted to move away from in recent years.

Figure 20. Map of Wereldmuseum Leiden. (Joost Kamp 2024).

Figure 21. China exhibition with Easter Island exhibition in the background (Joost Kamp 2024).

4.2.3 Analysis of displayed objects

When the Wereldmuseum changed its name in 2023, its mission statement also changed. The new Wereldmuseum has the mission to display and understand world cultures and research the world around us through their collection and exhibits (Wereldmuseum 2024). Through an analysis of displayed objects, this subchapter analyses how Chinese art is displayed in Wereldmuseum Leiden, especially considering the mission statement of the museum.

4.2.3.1 Lohan statues

Directly on the right side when entering the China exhibition is a display case that displays a collection of statues of the 18 Lohans (also known as Arhats) from Xiamen (Figure 19). The label of the display case mentions that Lohans are followers of Buddha that have achieved enlightenment but not Nirvana (heaven) yet. The label also states that the mission of a Lohan is to aid other to achieve enlightenment. The label explained that the group of 18 Lohan's is the most well-known, and that some of them are disciples of the current Buddha. Lastly, it mentions the original context of the 18 Lohan's which is in a row beside the main altar, or in the corridors leading to the main part of the temple. The statues were acquired by the museum in 1892, which together with the fact that they are from Xiamen and date back to 1886-1890 makes it very likely that they were originally commissioned and collected by J.J.M de Groot on his trip to Xiamen in 1886 (Werblowsky 2002, 57-8).

The display of the 18 Lohans illustrates several key issues identified and discussed in the literature review. Whilst the museums provides information about the Lohans on the label and on their website, the information could be improved by providing a more in-depth cultural and religious context, providing for instance also information about the provenance of the statues, which is not mentioned, and the religious importance of the statues. This way, the museum can provide a more comprehensive presentation of the 18 Lohans, aligning with efforts of decolonization end recontextualization of the exhibits especially since the name change of the museum in 2023.

4.2.3.2 Collection of Daoist Deities

The China also exhibits the collection of deities commissioned by J.J.M de Groot in Xiamen, Fujian province. The three top statues are from left to right: the demi-god of the city of Xiamen, the god of the city of Xiamen, and the god of erudite persons. The statues were made between 1886 and 1890 but were acquired by the museum later in 1893 (Wereldmuseum d). The museum mentions J.J.M de Groot on a separate museum label. The label states that de Groot was the first to study Chinese ethnography and mentions that he lived in Xiamen in China for two prolonged periods. First to study the language to become an interpreter in the Dutch East Indies, and the second time to collect objects and to study local religious rituals. The label mentions that de Groot wrote several works on religion in China, and that the religious traditions he wrote about are alive and well today. However, what the museum does not mention are the 19th century views de Groot had regarding European being superior and civilized opposed to non-European cultures. The museum does mention de Groot with Dutch colonization, mentioning that de Groot went to become an interpreter in the Dutch East Indies, but does not mention any implications of this, such as that de Groot was able to accomplish his achievement such as his publications and collection due to opportunities through Dutch colonization. As the Wereldmuseum aims to display, understand, and research world culture, it is crucial to include the background of influential collectors such as de Groot in the narrative to provide visitors with a comprehensive understanding of the historical context objects were collected in (figures 22 and 23).

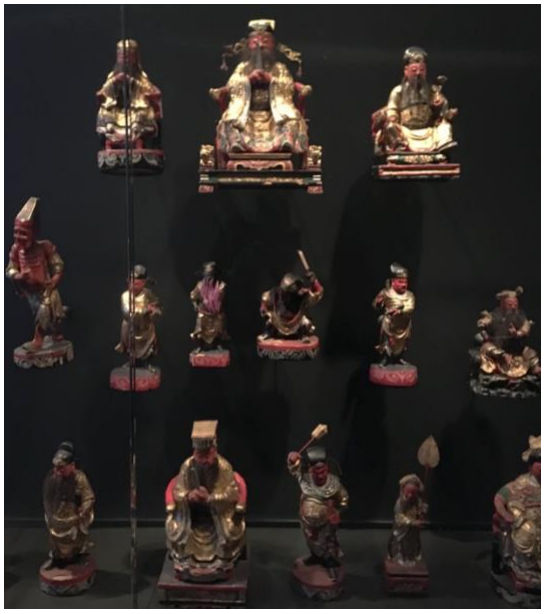

Figure 22. Collection of deities in Wereldmuseum Leiden. (Joost Kamp, 2024).

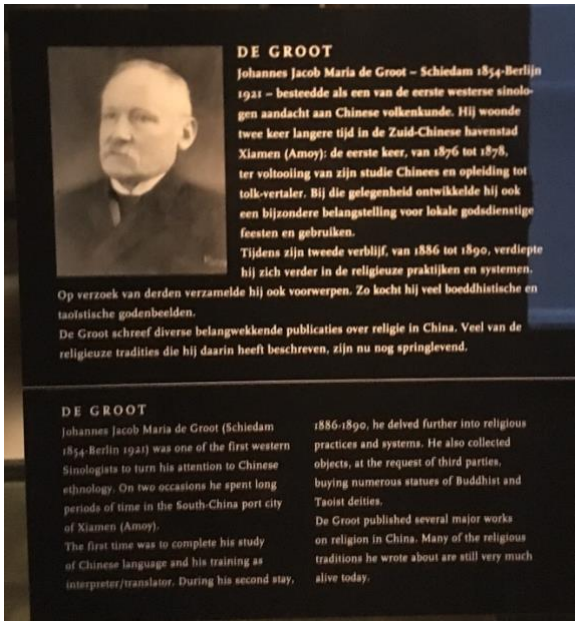

Figure 23. Museum label De Groot in Wereldmuseum Leiden. (Joost Kamp, 2024).

4.2.3.3 Bodhisattva Guanyin

Left of the entrance to the China exhibition a Chinese Bodhisattva Guanyin sculpture from wood dating back to the 11th-12th century is displayed (Figure xx and xx). Bodhisattva Guanyin sculptures from this period were used to worship Guanyin, the goddess of mercy and compassion in Buddhist temples. The label of the Guanyin mentions that it most likely originally comes from a Buddhist temple, and still is popular as the Goddess of Mercy and

Compassion. The label also describes the clothing it is depicted in is an Indian ‘dhoti’ or long cloth from the hips to the ground, and a scarf. The label discusses that the Chinese see and display Guanyin as a woman ever since the 12th century as they regard this clothing as feminine rather than masculine like in India.

The label of the sculpture mentions that Guanyin is the goddess of mercy, and that it most likely comes from a Buddhist temple but does not mention that it was originally used to actually worship Guanyin. Additionally, the label does not mention that Guanyin is worshipped in times of hardship and illness, to appeal prosperity, and for protection against evil (van Dongen, Forrer, and van Gulik 1987, 54). This Guanyin was acquired by the museum in 1952 at Berkeley Galleries in London. Before this, it was owned by renowned Japanese art dealer Yamanaka Tejiro whose employees took it from a Buddhist temple in northern China (Sijmonsbergen, Veys, and Konniger 2013, 158).

The Guanyin is displayed in its own glass display case, next to other Buddhist objects, among which a head of Guanyin, a travelling altar directly on the left. By displaying these objects together, the museum attempts to replicate the original context of these objects, as they all belong to Buddhist temples. This does however not change the fact that Wereldmuseum Leiden is not a Buddhist temple, and the objects have been delocalized and decontextualized by putting the objects in the museum and teach visitor about Chinese culture.

Figure 26 (left). (Wereldmuseum Leiden).
Figure 27 (right). Bodhisattva Guanyin in Wereldmuseum Leiden. (Joost Kamp, 2024).

4.2.3.4 Daoist Mountain

The center piece of the China exhibit is the Daoist Mountain or Mountain of the Immortals. The Mountain of Immortals belonged as focal points on the altar of a Daoist temple and was used for sacrificial ceremonies (Stevens 1997, 14). It consists of several layers of ledges on which figures of gods stand and are ranked. On this highest ledge are the 'Three Pure Ones', the highest ranked gods, in the center of which is Daoism's founder Lao Zi. In religious ceremonies, the role of these gods is to summon gods called in the ceremony. Many Daoist mountains have however been taken away from temples and, even broken up in different pieces, and bought by foreign collectors (Stevens 1997, 14). The Wereldmuseum received this specific Daoist as a handover in 2006 and is one of the only ones in Europe (Wereldmuseum 2024e). It is expected to come from the southeast of China, from the provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, or Guangdong as this is where early on most contact between Westerners and China took place (Sijmonsbergen, Veys, and Konniger 2013, 216).

The Daoist Mountain has a central location in the Daoist temple and is a focal point for reverence. However, by displaying it in the museum delocalized and decontextualized it by taking it from its original context, a Daoist temple in China, and relocating and recontextualizing it by displaying it in the museum to present it as a special piece to teach museum visitors about Chinese culture (Poulot 2015, 97). The museum transforms a religious object into a mere 'special object, stripping its cultural and religious meaning (Poulot 2015, 97). The museum slightly attempts to diminish this decontextualization as its label notes that the ceremonies that the Daoist Mountain features in can also be performed without it (Wereldmuseum 2024d). The fact that a religious ceremony can be performed without it, does however not make up for the fact that the object has been taken out of its original context, in order to function as object that teaches museum visitors about Chinese culture.

That Daoist are not common anymore in Chinese Daoist temples as they were often sold to collectors and decorates either whole or as loose gods, also raises questions on the history of this specific Daoist Mountain and its acquisition history.

(Figure 28. Daoist Mountain. (Wereldmuseum Leiden 2024).

4.2.4 Conclusion

Analyzing the China exhibition of Wereldmuseum Leiden shows three main critiques on tis execution of its goals and display of Chinese art. First, the museum was renamed from Museum Volkenkunde to Wereldmuseum Leiden in 2023, this came with a new goal to educate visitors about world cultures. However, the collection and exhibition, like the China exhibition from 2011, remain largely unchanged. Historically, directors of the museum and collectors viewed non-European cultures as uncivilized which also functioned to justify colonialism (Effert 2008, 22-3; Levitt 2015, 3). This colonial bias in early curatorial and collecting practices provides a flawed representation of cultures, displaying what colonizers wanted to portray. Aligned with the argument of Wang (2021, 732), modernization or self-reflection of the museum has largely just considered used terminology.

Second, the omission of critical art history in the exhibition is problematic. Many objects in the museum such as the Guanyin or Daoist mountain were delocalized and decontextualized. The museum fails to address the complete cultural and religious value of the objects and the provenance of pieces that might have been looted in the early 1900s such as the Guanyin Lorne, Rösch, and Lunsingh Scheurleer 2002, 380). This compromises the museum's educational mission.

Third, the focus on traditional culture in the China exhibition leads to an incomplete and static display of Chinese culture. By emphasizing tradition and antiquity the exhibition

perpetuates exoticization and outdated views on Chinese culture (Lee 2016, 359; Carbone and Wang 2020,1).

In sum, to answer the research question of this thesis, the way Chinese art is displayed in Wereldmuseum Leiden's China exhibition has three main shortcomings. There is a disconnect between the museum's new mission and its static curatorial practices. The exhibition lack essential art historical information and cultural context about display works, compromising its educational quality, and the focus on traditional culture results in a narrow and static display of Chinese culture that perpetuates outdated views and exoticization.

Chapter 5. Comparative Analysis

The two case studies of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam's Asian Pavilion and the Wereldmuseum Leiden China exhibition have shown how Chinese art is displayed in a national museum and an ethnographic museum. This chapter aims to compare and contrast the findings of the two case studies in three points.

First, both museums are critizised for decontextualization in their exhibition. The museums both have taken the objects discussed in the exhibition analaysis out of their original location and context and do not properly address this in the museum, perpatuating the decontextualization and causing recontextualization of the objects into museum pieces. The difference is that the Rijksmuseum prioritizes aesthetics over cultural and historical context in displaying Chinese art, whereas Wereldmuseum Leiden is due to failing to modernize the narrative of the exhibition and the stories of the displayed Chinese art.

Second, in both museums, Chinese art is displayed in a way that emphasizes exoticization. The museums in a similary manner emphasize exoticization of non-European cultures in the museum through the spatial arrangement of exhibtions. In Rijksmuseum Amsterdam this is mainly due to the separation of the Asian Pavilion from the main building and narrative of the museum. Exoticization in Wereldmuseum Leiden is exemplified by the fact that the Easter Island exhibition is within the China exhibition, which is not addressed. This contributes to the generalization of the 'exotic other' which the ethnographic museum originally aimed to display and wants to move away. Also, the Wereldmuseum has a stronger focus on traditional culture and antiquity in the China exhibition which provides a static display of Chinese culture and perpatuates exoticization. This is not the case in the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion.

Third, is the overall mission execution of the exhibitions. In Rijksmuseum Amsterdam the educational mission is flawed due to the proritization of aesthetics and disregarding of cultural and historical context which does not provide the development of Chinese arts and culture, and does not addresss the influence of colonial history on the Asian Pavilion. Wereldmuseum Leiden's mission is poorly executed in the China exhibition as the mission has been renewed in 2023 with the goal to educate people about world cultures, but the exhibition has not undergone significant changes and due to the focus on traditional culture

and a lack of critique on the colonial history of its own institution, the education about Chinese culture is flawed.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the research question of how Chinese art is displayed in the Netherlands, specifically in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and Wereldmuseum Leiden. By providing a solid literature overview, histories of the museums, and exhibition analysis this thesis comes to two conclusions.

Exemplified by using the word 'treasury' to descibe the Asian Pavilion, Chinese art in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam's Asian Pavilion is displayed in a way that emphasizes otherness and exoticization. Influenced by the KVVAK, the collection displays the taste of Dutch collectors rather than the evolution of Chinese art, and the displayed Chinese art is decontextualized through the prioritization of aesthetics over cultural context, and omission of acquisition history, colonial influences and cultural context.

Wereldmuseum Leiden's China exhibition sees a disconnect between the museum's new mission and its static curatorial practices. The exhibition lack essential art historical information and cultural context about display works, compromising its educational quality, and the focus on traditional culture results in a narrow and static display of Chinese culture that perpetuates outdated views and exoticization.

The comparative analysis found that both museums compromise the educational value of the exhibition by omitting critical cultural and historical contexts, and exoticizing Chinese art, impacting visitors' understanding of Chinese art and culture. Both museums also omit their colonial history and the effects of this on the display of Chinese art. The key differences are the Asian Pavilion's prioritization of aesthetics against the Wereldmuseum's outdated representation of Chinese arts and culture.

Naturally, there are limitations to these findings. The main one being the potential subjectivity of the analysis as they are based on existing literature and personal observations. However, as mentioned in the introduction, insights from an independent researcher, not a museum professional such as a conservator, allows for fresh insights.

Future research could analyze more museums museums in the Netherlands and abroad. Also, it would be interesting to look into how China exhibitions infleunce visitors. Did their view on Chinese culture change after visiting the exhibition?

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