Blue and White in the Land of Orange:

How Delftware Demonstrates the Dutch Understanding in the Early Modern World

By Austin Heerema

European knowledge of the world expanded vastly in the early modern period. Through economic and political rivalries, the powerful nations of Europe— including Russia, England, France, Spain, and Portugal—began pushing the boundaries of exploration, creating new maps, meeting new peoples, and discovering new continents. The European countries eagerly searched out new routes to China, both to avoid areas controlled by their rivals, and to discover faster and easier paths to the far East, which was famed for its silks and spices. They began colonizing areas around the world: Spain in South and Central America, Portugal in Africa and Brazil, France in Canada and North Africa, and England in the United States and India. From the forge of this rivalry ironically stemmed a new identity; Europa, representing all European nations, in contrast with the nations of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. “Europe,” says Benjamin Schmidt, author of *Inventing Exoticism*, “gains its identity through the exotic world... global exotica and their pleasures coalesce around a freshly constituted idea of ‘Europe.’” To Europeans, their relationship with the world was not one of conflict, but “of desire and delight,” and the door through which Europe obtained such delights was the Netherlands. One of the premier products produced in the Netherlands during the early modern period, especially between the years of 1600 and 1750, was delftware pottery. A variety of earthenware, delftware sought to imitate the colors, designs, and structure of the much rarer Chinese porcelain, a commodity which Europeans were unable to produce and were forced to import from Asia. As a variety of mass

---

produced object which was popular throughout the height of the Dutch golden age, deeply tied to visual cultures of the early modern period, how does delftware interact and reflect the Dutch understanding of themselves and their place in the world in the 17th and 18th centuries?

The history of delftware production in the Netherlands is one steeped with ties to Dutch empire. In the late 1500s, the Dutch rebelled from their Catholic, Spanish rulers. Led by William of Orange, first stadtholder of the country, they became independent. Almost simultaneously, but largely unrelated, the Dutch began imitating Italian majolica pottery and producing their own pottery style. In 1603, while at war with the Portuguese, the Dutch captured the Santa Catarina, a Portuguese trading ship loaded down with exotic goods from China. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) auctioned the contents, which included a large collection of porcelain. The porcelain was so popular that not only did the VOC proceed to explore trading opportunities with China specifically to acquire it, but Dutch potters imitating the blue-and-white designs, resulting in a beautiful earthenware that harkened back to Chinese porcelain, but cost much less. This earthenware quickly surged in popularity, and the earthenware took the name of the small town in which the greatest number of potters perfected their craft; Delft. In this way, delftware was born.

Unique in its time, the Dutch Empire was one of economy and trade, far more than it was one of conquest. However, this was a fact of circumstance more than plan; the Netherlands was, at one point, part of the bitter contest with Portugal, Spain, France, and England over colonies in the New World, Africa, and Asia. At various points it controlled New York, Surinam, Northeast Brazil, South Africa, several ports in India, Indonesia, and for 200 years was the only country

---

with rights to trade in Japan. Even today the Netherlands retains some Dutch territory in the
Caribbean. In the mid-1600s, however, the Netherlands lost many of its overseas colonies.

Unfavorable wars with many of its neighbors, including France and England, were challenging
for the Dutch to withstand given their comparatively small population. Following the
Anglo-Dutch war, New York was traded to England for Suriname. The Dutch colonies in Brazil
were overthrown rather quickly by the Portuguese residents. The Dutch were left without large
holdings in the West Indies, and so turned their empire into one of commerce and trade rather
than conquest. Schmidt, author of *Inventing Exoticism*, describes this as necessary for the success
of Dutch travel and geography texts, because it allowed the Dutch to produce works that were
not specifically tied to one colonial empire. Popular travel books of the time often praised the
qualities of a specific royal family, putting a nationalistic spin on otherwise a-political texts and
limiting their market. The Dutch, with no royal family and without direct colonial competition,
created works instead that were broadly appealing due to their culturally unspecific yet high
quality descriptions of the world. Dutch-produced delftware was equally non-specific; as a
decorative art, delftware became synonymous with luxury in part because it imitated popular
Asian porcelain, and in part because it was marketed to a European, rather than Dutch, audience,
appealing to a broad range of buyers. This general nature, however, makes delftware difficult to
interpret; many of the designs on it are merely imitations or repetitions of popular designs in
Asian pottery, and existed throughout the years of its popularity. Even today it is fairly common
to find floral patterned pieces that harken back to the earliest Chinese-style plates and jars.

---

3 Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 64.
The “plate” in figure 1 is an interesting example of Dutch Delftware for a number of reasons. Made around 1680 and designed to hang on a wall like a painting, this tile is unusually large, and was likely created for a wealthy client, perhaps commissioned specially. It has suffered somewhat severe damage, particularly in the center and top corner. While the top corner was left, the crack in the glaze along the center was well repaired. The fact that these large flaws existed, but were ignored or repaired rather than replacing the whole plate, is a testament to the difficulty of the craft. Many decorative wall hangings like this were made in Delft, but few exist that are in such good condition. Some have beveled edges, indicating that they were hung in frames (Fig. 2). Others have frames crafted into the piece itself (Fig 3). This piece seems to have neither. It is unclear exactly where in the house a delftware piece such as this would have hung. Perhaps they were used as more durable paintings, hung in places like the kitchen, where an oil painting might be damaged by smoke or water, or in a brightly lit hallway, which would have faded a similar oil painting.

Like many delftware pieces, our wall hanging depicts a classical scene of Chinoiserie. In it, a group of performers entertains the viewer with a myriad of unusual talents and skills. One holds a rock up in the air. Another man trains mice to dance. Two Chinese men stab a basket, presumably with another man inside. One tall performer holds an enormous stick, on which is balanced a second performer. In the background a city’s wall blocks off one side, while Chinese style boats with characteristic accordion-style sales float along the river. In the distance are

---

4 Plate, Painted with Chinoiserie Decoration, ca.1680, delftware faience painted in enamel, h 63.5cm X w 92.0cm X d 1.5cm, Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
5 Isaac Junius (attributed), Plate with the Portrait of Dionysius Sprankhusen, 1660, delftware faience, h 19.5cm X w 13.5cm X d 1cm, Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
6 Plate, Painted with representation of Christ and the Adulteress, ca. 1763, delftware faience, Rotterdam, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
several enormously tall pagodas, while in the foreground numerous tropical plants and small animals twine around each other, competing for the attention of the eyes of the audience. It seems, like so many other pieces, like a direct copy of a Chinese scene, perhaps one that came off a dish or a silk screen. Closer inspection, however, reveals the truth; little, if any, of this painting comes from a Chinese source.

The most egregious difference between this scene and one that might appear on Chinese porcelain is the perspective. In western painting, which was- and still is, to an extent- focused on realism, the horizon line, representing the viewer’s eye level, dictates the angle of various objects in a given scene. Ironically, distorting the reality of the image gives the painting a realistic perspective. Chinese porcelain paintings, however, do not focus on this style of perspective at all. Rather, the emphasis is placed on parallelism. This leads to potentially a more literally accurate image- after all, the buildings don’t actually get shorter the farther away they are- but when placed on a two-dimensional surface it causes the image to feel flat and unrealistic. This style of Chinese painting was copied by Dutch potters regularly (Fig. 4). However, in the wall hanging it was not. This image, instead, came from a European print. Visual mediums in the early modern period often exchanged not only themes, but sometimes directly copied images. Popular images were repeated more than once, across multiple forms of medium; little care was given at the time for artistic or intellectual property. This was often done for commercial effect, as familiar prints sometimes sold better than unfamiliar ones, and had the interesting effect of introducing some images to the popular conscious and even some blatant falsities became generally held truths.

---

7 Lambertus van Eenhoorn (attributed), Flower Pyramid, ca. 1700, delftware faience, h 156.0cm X w 38.0cm X d 38.0cm, De Metaale Pot (attributed), Delft, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
8 Schmidt, Inventing Exoticism, 51.
Often when an image on delftware is copied from a print, the source print is completely unknown and unlikely to be found. Luckily, we know what prints inspired this plate, in part because the source was the inspiration for a number of other prints and images. The source for the images on this plate can most directly be attributed to Johan Nieuhof, a Dutch man hired by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to record his travels to China and report on the success of the embassy in establishing an official Sino-Dutch trade agreement. His book, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China: waar in de gedenkwaardighste Geschiedenissen, die onder het reizen door de Sineesche Landschappen (...) sedert den jare 1655 tot 1657 zijn voorgevallen (...) verhandelt worden. Beneffens Een Naukeurige Beschrijving der Sineesche Steden, Dorpen, Regeering, Wetenschappen, Hantwerken, Zeden, Godsdiensten, Gebouwen, Drachten, Scheepen, Bergen, Gewassen, Dieren, etc. en Oorlogen tegen de Tarters. Verciert met over de 150 Afbeeltsels, na’t leven in Sina getekent* was first published in Amsterdam by Jacob van Meurs, an art dealer, engraver, and publisher. Through *Het Gezantschap*, and to a lesser extent several other travel works, van Meurs and Nieuhof redesigned the traditional travel story, appealing to a broad distinctively European (as opposed to national) audience. Key to this broad appeal were the impressive print illustrations drawn from Nieuhof’s sketches, which are repeatedly referenced as *na’t leven in Sina getekent*, or “drawn from life in China.” Enormous statues, glorious pagodas, exotic palm trees, boats, maps, and people of all kinds populate the pages of the printed adventure.

---

There is no one print from which the delftware painter copied his image. That much is clear by simply leafing through the images which were provided with van Meurs’ publication. The circus performance is most likely related to the image on page 32 (Fig. 5) of the general knowledge section of the book, which displays a nearly identical scene with a man training rats to dance, a man stabbing a basket, the man balancing on a pole above another man, and even the man with a piece of string through his nose. However, the richly dressed couple in the back and the small boat with a couple having tea are absent in the van Meurs circus image. The circus performs are also much more animated and finely dressed in the delftware painting than in the print in van Meurs production. It seems as though the delftware painter took artistic license, and combined several images into one enormous painting, while simultaneously changing the scene to create more visual interest.

For example, the pagodas and wall have direct analogous images in the illustrations of van Meurs’ publication. Specifically, a small wall appears in the circus performer scene on page 32. Especially notable are the curved roofs over some of the tower wall, and the Chinese style houses which peak over from the town beyond. Other similar walls speckle both the van Meurs text and Nieuhof’s original manuscript. The finely dressed couple is certainly based on the “Toneel Speelders (literally translated as stage-play operators, but meaning actors),” seen on General Information page 31 (Fig. 6), based on the similarities between the woman’s hairstyle

---


11 Nieuhoff, Het Gezantschap, 53-54.
and fan and the man’s beard, sword, crown and spear. However, they appear not as actors in the wall hanging, but instead seem to represent wealthy persons enjoying the circus, as they are followed around by fan-wielding servants. Clearly the painter did not just copy various images together. He added his own interpretations, utilizing his own understanding of China to make the image more exotic, and therefore more delightful to the viewer. By removing images from their context and placing them in a new context, the delftware painter changed the narrative of the scenes entirely.

One interesting case study is the man holding a boulder above his head. It is unclear in the wall hanging what the goal of said man is. Is holding the boulder a test of strength? Is he trying to squeeze water out of it? Why is he dressed so unusually compared to his companions? The answers to these questions are found not only in van Meurs’ publication of Nieuhof’s adventures, but in Nieuhof’s original manuscript. The only copy of his original manuscript is in France, but the images are widely available and demonstrate the actual images which Nieuhof illustrated, without any alterations by publishers or painters.

In van Meurs’ publication, we see the man holding the rock on page 36 of the general knowledge section (Fig. 7). The Delftware image is almost exactly the same as the van Meurs print, including his pose, his expression, and his strange garment. Even his belly is the same exact shape as in the print. Van Meurs’ book also helps to illustrate exactly what he is doing with the rock; bashing it onto his chest. However, the man’s goal seems to be different in the van Meurs print than in the wall hanging. On the piece of delftware, the man is bashing his chest with a rock as part of a performance, perhaps as a feat of strength or endurance. In the van Meurs

---

version, though, performance is not the goal. Instead, he is displayed to illustrate how the Chinese “business seems strange in asking for charity." The man is a mendicant, relying on begging to survive, explaining the minimal clothing he wears on the delftware image, compared to his cohorts. Van Meurs’ description of such begging is designed to intrigue the European reader, by establishing the exotic, unusual techniques by which he goes about it. While in Europe it was not unusual for people to sit and beg or rely on charity in the church, in China, according to Nieuhof (who does describe this scene in his original manuscript, albeit illustrated with a different arrangement of mendicants, Fig. 8) and van Meurs, it seems the mendicants rely on threats and acts of self-harm to receive charity. Some, for example, slam their heads onto rocks that lay on the ground. Others, according to Nieuhof, light their hair on fire until the smell draws the attention of onlookers. The man holding the stone in the image is bashing his chest, hoping that passers-by will pay him to stop. Such practices were infinitely interesting to European audiences, who found such information new and exciting, while also displaying the inherent barbarism characteristic of all those not from enlightened Europe. However, as the image of the man transferred from manuscript to published book to delftware painting, his original context is removed.

The forefront, like the mid-ground, finds its origins in the van Meurs publication, but not in the original Nieuhof manuscript. It was common in printing during the late 1600s to add borders to prints, to create a sort of dynamic audience interaction with the scene, as if one was peering through the foliage as the events of the print occur. For example, grasses, sand dunes,

---

14 Nieuhoff, Het Gezantschap, 34.
16 Nieuhoff, Het Gezantschap, 36.
17 Sun, The Illusion of Verisimilitude, 128.
or people might have been placed in the corners, printed darkly, to create a framing effect around the image. This is repeated throughout the van Meurs prints, and was likely utilized in the painting due to its recognizable use in depictions of exotic lands. Though the exact border presented in the delftware hanging is not found in his prints, comparable ones are available.

The animals and plants that populate the border are also interesting studies. The plants have large, lush leaves, typical of what one might consider a tropical climate. Some sort of spotted lizard peaks out in the center of the border, while to the right a small bird perches on a plant stalk. In the very right corner, two cranes search for food, one with a small snake in its beak. Small birds and lizards, like the one in this border, are not rare decorations in prints, and they are even more common in traditional delftware pottery. The cranes with the snake are also very common, both in eastern and western depictions. However, while similar border images are scattered throughout the van Meurs publication, likely pieced together by the delftware painter with stylistic eastern images already popular in delftware production, no such borders exist in the original manuscript provided by Johan Nieuhof.

Though many of the plants in the border are not easily identifiable, one of them is. On the left side of the image, by the man with the rock, sits a spikey and familiar fruit. The pineapple is an interesting choice for this depiction. Like the borders, which are common in the van Meurs publication, the pineapple appears at least twice in van Meurs’ prints, both towards the end of the publication (Fig. 9). Indeed, in the section labeled “Vruchten (fruit),” it seems that Nieuhof has quite a lot to say on the subject of “Ananas.” The problem, however, is that Nieuhof’s original manuscript does not mention pineapples, nor do any of his illustrations depict them. That is not

18 Nieuhoff, Het Gezantschap, 148-149.
to say that Nieuhof was unaware of the existence of pineapples. Quite the contrary, before his travel to China he had spent some time in Brazil, where it seems very unlikely that he would not have encountered such an important fruit. As J. L. Collins, of the Pineapple Institute of Hawaii, states, “At the time that America was discovered the pineapple appears to have been well distributed throughout most of tropical America.” It was even described by Columbus when he first arrived in the Caribbean. It is clear that van Meurs added the pineapple later, despite no indication that Nieuhof actually saw one in China. That is not to say they did not exist there; it seems that pineapples were introduced to China via the Portuguese at some point before the end of the 16th century, perhaps through their port in Macau or indirectly from the East Indies.

Perhaps Nieuhof told people that he saw pineapples in China, but did not include it in his record, which was, after all, meant to be a geo-political record, not an economic or botanical one. It is certainly possible that Nieuhof encountered the tropical fruit (and had he done so, he would surely have recognized them) but we have no way to know.

In fact, the entire final section of the book, dubbed “Algemeene Beschryving van ‘t Ryk Sina (General Account of the Chinese Empire) was clearly added by van Meurs, as reference materials for the reader to better understand the objects and people discussed in the first, Nieuhof written section. Interestingly, despite being an amalgamation of knowledge added by van Meurs, at least some of the knowledge and a few of the images presented in this section were produced originally by Nieuhof. It is here we find the print version of the man banging his head with a rock, as well as (in a separate print) the two men bashing their heads together and the man

---

stabbing himself through the cheek.\textsuperscript{21} This section also contains numerous prints not found in the original work by Nieuhof. Perhaps most infamously, Albert Dereer’s inaccurate version of a rhinoceros (Fig. 10) appears in the animal section and is, “among the longest-lived exotic images, famously reproduced in scores of prints and material objects.\textsuperscript{22,}”

The question then becomes, why did van Meurs alter Nieuhof’s narrative? By adding general information about China, including the presence of pineapple, the image of a rhinoceros, and rearranging the positions of the mendicants, what did van Meurs hope to gain? The answer, I believe, lies in the economy. As mentioned, the success of Dutch printing relied on having a wide viewing audience. The Dutch were exceptionally literate for an early modern society, yet their small population would seem to hinder publication. However, the Dutch actually became quite well known for their successful printing industry. As previously mentioned, part of this had to do with the widespread popularity of their books in various countries all around Europe. Dutch printers relied on this pan-European audience, and as such produced folios which appealed not to a certain nationality, but to Europeans as a whole. To reach this end, the Dutch created a narrative not only of pan-Europeanism, but also of pan-Exoticism. All the world was considered equally exotic and foreign, with little interest placed on distinguishing one far-off local from another. The other three continents- America, Africa, and Asia- were lumped together in terms of climate and culture, despite being wildly different.\textsuperscript{23} Folios that present the world in such a way were very popular.

Delftware naturally borrowed considerably from travel journals and published prints, and also reaped the benefits of pan-exoticism. In fact, delftware may even have utilized it better than

\textsuperscript{21} Nieuhoff, \textit{Het Gezantschap}, 34-36.
\textsuperscript{22} Schmidt, \textit{Inventing Exoticism}, 54.
\textsuperscript{23} Schmidt, \textit{Inventing Exoticism}, 276.
print medium did, as not only did the subject matter of the pottery often harken to far off lands, but the material itself imitated the famous Chinese porcelain. Chinese symbols were often used and replicated without an understanding of their meaning, such as the incense burner painted on the bottom of a delftware plate from the Grieksche A (Fig. 11). Incense in China was often painted on porcelain as a sort of good luck or blessing, but in Europe the incense burner was a blessing only in that it made selling the earthenware more profitable.

Another relevant and previously mentioned example, pineapples were widely popular in Europe during the Early Modern period. There were many reasons for this. Being from the New World (pineapples were widely cultivated throughout Central and South America for hundreds of years before Columbus), it held connotations of far-off exotica. It was also completely unlike any fruit to which Europeans had been exposed to before, both in appearance and in flavor. The pineapple’s hard rind made it a useful fruit as well; it could be taken on long voyages and would keep for a very long time compared to the other citrus fruits, and could therefore help prevent scurvy for much longer than oranges or limes could. Like strawberries, pineapples can grow from side shoots, meaning the fruit can be eaten without hindering reproduction. It was also widely known to grow in tropical- i.e., alien- climates. Pineapples were so popular, in fact, that it was not uncommon for a wealthy merchant to rent out pineapples he owned to wealthy friends, who could then display them at fancy dinner parties. The presence of a pineapple in the delftware scene would therefore not have been unusual, as a symbol of luxury, exoticism, and wealth. To eat pineapple off of a Chinoiserie dish would have been the peak of sophistication.

---

24 Plate with Figurative Mark Incense Burner, ca. 1690-1720, delftware faience, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.  
Palm trees are also very prevalent in the prints produced for the book, and play a very central role in the painting on our plate, not only taking up a sizable chunk of the midground, but also providing a place for a figure- whether human or monkey is not totally clear- to hang on to. The palm tree trunks, however, are nothing like the palm trees presented in the prints from van Meurs’ publication. In fact, it seems almost as though the painter combined the stalk of a bamboo frond, like the one holding up the acrobat to the right of the trees, with the more accurate palm-tree representation that features in van Meurs’ work. Once again, though, these palms are an image without precedent; the palm trees which appear in so many of the van Meurs prints are completely absent in the original Nieuhof manuscript. Nieuhof illustrates not a single palm tree, for very good reason; much of Nieuhof’s journey took place inland, away from the oceans, and in very temperate climates, not at all palm tree weather. However, like the pineapple, the palm tree was a representation of the exotic, and the audience cared more for the feel of the creation rather than the realism of it.

In fact, paintings “from life” in the early modern Dutch world had often little to do with reality or life painting the way we think of it today, with the modern emphasis on exact realism, exacerbated by modern photographic techniques. Rather, it instead focused heavily on creating the appearance of reality. Landscape painters often traveled to various places in Europe, drew images from life in their sketch books, then returned to the Netherlands and created entirely new scenes from combinations of their various reference sketches. These scenes were painted in very lifelike ways, creating the illusion of reality while actually depicting only what the painter wished the viewer to see. Van Meurs, and indeed Nieuhof himself, would have been aware of

---

27 Nieuhof, Het Gezantschap, 32, 148-149.
28 Sun, The Illusion of Verisimilitude, 132.
these artist trends. Van Meurs’ prints are not then unusual in their embellishments; in fact, had van Meurs not embellished the prints by adding “exotic” images to them, it would have made his book highly unusual, and probably effected its sale value negatively. Even Nieuhof likely embellished his own illustrations with what he expected, rather than what he saw exactly, though not as much as van Meurs did. Van Meurs also placed the “from life” drawings of Nieuhof next to images of circuses, elephants, and pineapples, changing the context of the images. The exotic images were granted authority by Nieuhof’s “from life” approach, while Nieuhof’s images gained interest by interacting with the exotic and foreign. The result was a book which sold incredibly well throughout Europe.

The same market forces which caused van Meurs to alter and embellish the words and images of Nieuhof had a similarly strong effect on the Dutch delftware industry, and the painter of the circus wall hanging. In the 17th century, interest in the exotic realm of China was extremely high among all social classes, providing delftware with a market in the first place. However, this market was not for China as it was, but rather the market was for China as Europe believed it was. General European audiences wanted China through the eyes of a European; rather than displaying the day-to-day life of peasants, Europeans wanted eye-catching scenes, rare animals, unusual customs, and intricate buildings.

One such conflation of exotic themes is the so called “phoenix” pattern, common on Chinese porcelain, which was then copied as a Chinoiserie symbol onto delftware pottery. The charger in figure demonstrates such a design (Fig. 12). Copied directly from a Japanese print, it shows two elaborate birds interacting near a bamboo shoot. Such images were popular, and were
often imitated. However, the phoenix comes not from China, but is a Greek mythological bird. One record of it comes from Herodotus. He describes the phoenix as, “a great rarity, even in Egypt,” where the phoenix supposedly lived. Herodotus’ History, while not considered an accurate account by current measures, was considered a perfectly valid history well into the early modern period. The phoenix moreover was associated with Egypt, and therefore with the exotic realm of not only Africa (its geographical location) but also Asia, due to the fact that it was said to live in Arabia when not in Egypt. The Chinese porcelain, however, does not display a phoenix, which Herodotus describes as follows, “the plumage is partly red, partly golden, while the general make and size are almost exactly that of the eagle.” The birds on the charger are clearly neither red and gold (though that may have to do with delftware blue and white tradition) nor are they particularly eagle-like. Their plumage is similar to a peacock or a bird of paradise, but peacocks were well known in Europe and birds-of-paradise were South American, so the Chinese (or, in this case, the Japanese) had no way to know about them. Instead it seems that these images represent fenghuang, a mythological Chinese bird (Fig. 13). When introduced to the west, these bird designs were conflated with symbols of exoticism which the Europeans were familiar with, in this case the mythological phoenix. In some museums, including the Rijksmuseum, efforts have been put in place to remedy the confusion, but such efforts are anachronistic and do not reflect European trends during the Early Modern period.

31 Herodotus, The History, Book II.
32 Dish with a Qilin and Fenghuang in a Landscape, ca. 1700-1724, Porcelain with underglaze blue and enamel colors, h 5.2cm X rim diam 38.7cm X foot diam 21.2cm, China, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
The bamboo on the charger also suffered a re-interpretation; Europeans often called bamboo “tea-trees,” due to bamboo’s frequent appearance on Chinese porcelain and the association many Europeans made between China and tea drinking. Some tea drinkers can even be seen in the wall hanging, floating in a small boat, seemingly uninterested in the circus nearby. This importance placed on tea caused another interesting case of mixing reality and fantasy for public consumption. Instead of conflating two mythical creatures though, these artists instead fused an existing plant, bamboo, with the concept that tea comes from some unspecified tea plant. The fact that delftware was often used to create tea paraphernalia, such as teacups, saucers, and sugar jars, should not be overlooked. The use of exotic designs on exotic pottery to hold exotic substances reinforced the European worldview that combined the exotic and the luxurious, regardless of actual context. The fact that the designs had no meaning, the delftware was an imitation, and the tea was likely from local growers did little to disturb the delight that Dutch- and European- audiences found in it.

Whereas some delftware traditions pulled from and conflated exotic images to produce a scene which appealed to European audiences, the charger also shows that some styles combined exotic themes with European ones, while simultaneously advertising a very “European” understanding of luxury. In this instance, the boarders of the charger are fully European in design, with scrolling and small winged putti along the borders. Other examples involve the “Long Eliza,” a common theme in both Chinese porcelain and in delftware pottery. The elongated female figure represents a combination of the elegant luxury of the Chinese court and the romantic exoticism of far off China. The exotic and the luxurious are conflated in a way

---

33 Rijksmuseum, Museum label for Charger.
similar to the pineapple, though perhaps more region-specific than the off-handed way pineapples seem to be used. The gamboling child is a similar motif, and they often appear together. Between the years of 1745 and 1765, towards the end of my period of study, a Long Eliza was created that differed greatly from what had come before. This “Oriental Lady holding a Violin” is most shocking because she is, as the piece’s title suggests, holding a violin (Fig. 14). The violin is a distinctly European instrument, not associated at all with Asia, or exoticism. If this delftware sculpture was depicting a real person, or even merely pulling the traditional Long Eliza motif into three dimensions, it would certainly not hold such an instrument. However, realism was not the goal. In a way, the goal seems not to have even been a depiction of Chinoiserie. Rather, the goal was to emphasize two traits that seemed to conflate in the European mind during the early modern period; exoticism and luxury. The violin was a luxury instrument. Not nearly as luxurious as a piano or other furniture-sized piece, but the violin was essentially available only to those with enough money to afford one and enough time to learn how to play it. Her dress is also unique; it is clearly based off of a non-European design, perhaps a *Japonse rok* (Banyan), but the floral pattern is clearly not Asian in style. In fact, the Gemeentemuseum states point blank that the design was most likely from the artist’s own imagination. In other words, the painter had a notion of what was luxurious and exotic, and painted the “Oriental Lady” with that in mind, instead of using a reference.

---

Stepping even further from the origin, but still using the same Long Eliza decorative motif, are three pots on display at the Rijksmuseum (Fig. 15). Part of a garniture set, the full collection probably contained 5 or 7 pots of similar design. Garnitures like these became very popular as decoration, taking their place atop cabinets and along fireplaces, while simultaneously advertising the wealth of their owners by either holding exquisite flowers, or remaining unused and solely for decoration. Though these examples were made in 1765, and thus are beyond the period which I proposed to study, they draw on motifs and artistic designs that were popular throughout the 1700s. Of course, the Long Eliza-shaped heads provide an element of Chinese exoticism, and the scenes depicted on the sides draw heavily from traditional Chinese and Japanese designs. The colors of the pottery, however, are an entirely different sort. Pastel and asymmetrical, they follow the rococo design aesthetic. The curved, almost shell shapes of the pottery, called rocailles, were extremely popular in the period following the reign of Louis XIV, and demonstrate how thoroughly delftware had shifted from imitating foreign luxuries to being a luxury in itself; the Chinese heads on top are almost an afterthought.

The shift from direct imitation of foreign luxuries towards more Europe-centric designs also demonstrates a shift in what defined luxury. Louis XIV of France was a key player in the development of a new Eurocentric style of delftware pottery, though through indirect means. The Sun King, as he was called, was an immensely powerful absolutist monarch. His court, centered at Versailles, was immense, ornate, and set apart from the rest of the country. It was, in essence, a temple to the power of the King. These baroque trends rapidly spread across Europe, with

---

38 Rijksmuseum, Museum label for *Three Vases, Part of a Garniture*, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, June 13, 2016.
courts creating vast palaces, collecting marvelous works of art, and centralizing power so as to compete with the infamous French king. The Dutch were among the most ardent imitators of French luxury, which had established a new precedent; the exotic became a facet of luxury, rather than a definer of it.

In the process of competing with the French monarch, William III and Mary II, joint rulers of England, imitated Louis XIV’s fashions and trends, displaying ostentatious wealth and central power despite the considerable limitations set upon their throne by Parliament. William had been the Stadtholder of the Netherlands (the closest thing the country had to a monarchy at the time) and had joined his wife on the throne of England after her father, Charles II, was removed during the “Glorious Revolution” for his Catholic sympathies. They were assisted in their rivalry with the French by the famous Huguenot designer Daniel Marot, who had fled from France to the Netherlands- along with many other Huguenots- due to persecution in France and the religious freedom which the Netherlands provided. The Huguenots were often skilled craftsmen, and their knowledge of French trends helped to spread French styles throughout Europe, especially in the Netherlands. Marot in particular designed the Het Loo palace in the Netherlands in the French baroque style, and when William and Mary were crowned the rulers of England Marot came as well, and helped to redesign the palace of Hampton Court.  

Another example of the influence of Louis XIV over his Dutch-English rivals is a set of busts located in the Rijksmuseum. They depict William and Mary in blue-and-white delftware, dressed in lavish court attire (Fig. 16, 17). However, instead of wearing traditional

---

41 Lambertus Van Eenhoorn, *Bust of King-Stadtholder William III*, ca. 1695-1700, delftware faience, h 41.5cm X w 24.0cm X d 9.0cm, De Metaale Pot, Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
42 Samuel Van Eenhoorn, *Bust of Mary Stuart*, ca. 1680-1690, delftware faience, h 32.0cm X w 17.0cm X d 8cm, De Grieksche A, Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
Dutch or English garments, both seem to be wearing outfits and crowns in the style of the French court. William could almost be mistaken for Louis XIV himself, a testament to the skill brought over from France when De Metaale Pot, a Dutch pottery, acquired their first Huguenot sculptor. Moreover, these busts serve no practical purpose. They do not hold wigs, nor flowers, nor any other type of decoration, and are therefore displays of ostentatious wealth. The difficulty of sculpting such pieces is evidenced by the flaws in other delftware pieces—such as the discussed Nieuhof inspired plate— and the complexity of the piece itself. To have the piece merely serve as decoration indicates an enormous disposable income, and to show that the family who owned them was loyal to their absolute and European monarchs. To have these busts then imitate French fashion shows the influence such fashions had over the wealthy and influential of Europe.

Both English monarchs were very fond of flower arrangement, and Mary in particular was fascinated by the beautiful delftware produced in the Netherlands.\(^{43}\) These interests led to perhaps the greatest works ever produced by the Dutch delftware potters; the enormous tulip pyramids (Fig. 18). These tulip pyramids, more a combination of an obelisk and a pagoda (again conflating eastern and western themes), were decorated with both Chinese-inspired designs and very European style figures and busts. They became extremely popular among the wealthiest members of Europe’s elite, as the proper display of one indicated not only the wealth required to purchase it, but also enough capital to provide exotic and colorful flowers, which would have to be replaced regularly. Ironically, as far as delftware was concerned, the imitated became the imitator—Louis XIV owned a large tulip pyramid which is on display at the Louvre in Paris (Fig. 19).\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Van Eenhoorn, *Flower Pyramid*.

As William and Mary imitated Louis XIV, and Louis XIV in turn imitated them, a new, wholly European fashion emerged, dominating the courts in Russia, the Italian and German states, Austria, France, England, and the Netherlands. The newly formed European Baroque style quickly dominated the market in many artistic fields. With a unified sense of European taste, the Dutch were able to create a brand that was palpable to a wider European audience. Delftware potteries drew on themes which were quintessentially European, rather than specifically Dutch, English, or even French. The delftware clogs which are popular with tourists are nowhere to be seen at this point in time; rather the high heeled shoes (Fig. 20) and wig holders (Fig. 21) in the Louis XIV style were produced. Though the Asian influence never left—Chinese style plates and bottles were still very popular—potters became more creative in their styles. One newly introduced theme, which nearly all of Europe came to recognize as a shared cultural history, was that of Roman and Greek mythology. Poseidon appears on washbasins, which were common amenities in the early modern Netherlands. Cherubic cupid appears on a number of works from this era, as do specific scenes from mythology (Fig. 22). One plate in particular depicts a quintessentially European scene in a very European style. The plate depicts the rape of Europa by Zeus/Jupiter (Fig. 23). The figure itself is of course identifiably European— the mythological Europa gave her name to the continent— but the image itself is also clearly western. Created at some point between 1715 and 1722, this dish is also based on an engraving. The “Roof van

---

45 *Pair of Shoes*, ca. 1740-1760, delftware faience, length 13cm, Delft, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. [http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.15876](http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.15876)

46 Lambertus Cleffius (attributed), *Decorative Object of Faience with Chinoiserie Decoration*, ca. 1680-1690, delftware faience, h 25cm, De Metaal Pot (attributed), Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

47 *Wall Fountain with Cover and Basin*, ca. 1691-1724, delftware faience, De Metaal Pot, Delft, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

48 Adriaan Van Rijselbergh (attributed), *Charger with the Rape of Europa*, ca. 1715-1722, delftware faience, diam 40 cm, De Grieksche A (attributed), Delft, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
Europa,” created in 1590, was one of Henrick Goltzius’ many prints which centered on Greco-Roman mythology (Fig. 24).49 He also made many prints which were based on Christian themes, including ones representing the annunciation and portraits of the apostles. Delftware in turn often copied Christian themes, which became very popular in both Catholic and Protestant nations.50 All of these are pan-European themes, which Dutch print makers had found to be economical due to their mass popularity in many countries. Even the framing designs are the floral swirls of baroque and rococo, rather than the leafy shrubs that populate porcelain pieces and the more common blue-and-white delftware. Only the red and gold of the frame imitates a traditional style of luxury; the colors specifically harken back to Japanese Imari porcelain, a type which was only available to the Dutch through their exclusive trading rights in Japan. Just as a pan-exoticism was produced, so too was a pan-European style, which ironically was founded through very nationalistic and imperialistic competition.

Ultimately what delftware tells us is that the Netherlands in the Early Modern period, particularly in the period between 1600 and 1750, shifted its view of its place in the world. The Netherlands became defined not by its Dutch-ness (though nationalistic tendencies did not go away by any means) but by its quintessential European-ness. In courting a broad, international market, the delftware industry- like other visual mediums, including print- produced a product which emphasized broadly appealing and unifying themes, with the rare exceptions being those pieces specifically commissioned or commemorating special events. These themes, while culturally amalgamating Europe under the image of a Rome-descended Europa bathed in luxury, simultaneously created a broad and general outlook on the rest of the world. European became

the standard, while the rest of the world became exotic- sometimes bizarre, sometimes
intimidating, and always fascinating. Even more than prints, which usually were contextualized
by virtue of the story written in the books in which the images are placed, the imagery that
appeared on Dutch produced delftware was removed from its traditional context. In fact, by
placing said images on delftware (an imitation of the foreign luxury of porcelain) a new context
was created, which combined the exoticism of the image with the exoticism of the material. The
broad European style market produced by the Dutch had no need to be precisely accurate; the
international-but-continental audience wished to be dazzled by the wonders of the world, not
dictated a reality. They wanted Elizas playing violins and pineapples in China, and they wished it
to be served to them- both figuratively and literally- on a blue-and-white platter. The Dutch
became a European style door to a homogenously foreign world, viewing themselves as the
producers and definers of trade and taste for Europe’s educated elite. The reality of what they
produced was only tangentially relevant, if at all, and it was viewed through a Dutch-devised
European lens.
Fig.1: Plate, Painted with Chinoiserie Decoration
Fig 2: Plate with the Portrait of Dionysius Spranckhusen. The corners are beveled to fit in a frame.

Fig 3: Plate, Painted with representation of Christ and the Adulteress. Notice the frame is part of the piece.
Fig 4: Side of van Eenhoorn’s *Flower Pyramid*. Notice how it imitates Chinese special techniques.

Fig 5: Print of a circus from *Het Gezantschap*. 
Fig 6: Print of three actors, one male and two female, from *Het Gezantschap*.

Fig 7: Print of mendicants from *Het Gezantschap*. 
Fig. 8: Original Nieuhof Manuscript Image featuring Mendicants

Fig. 9: Print of a Pineapple from Het Gezantschap
Fig. 10: Print featuring Dereer’s Rhinoceros from *Het Gezantschap*
Fig. 11: Incense burner painted on the underside of a plate

Fig. 12: Charger, featuring phoenix (fenghuang) and tea trees (bamboo)

Fig. 13: Dish with a Qilin and Fenghuang in a Landscape
Fig. 14: *Oriental Lady Holding a Violin*
Fig. 15: *Three Vases, Part of a Garniture*, pulling from the Long Eliza tradition.

Fig. 16: *Bust of King-Stadtholder William III*
Fig. 17: *Bust of Mary Stuart*
Fig. 18: van Eenhoorn’s *Flower Pyramid* in full.
Fig. 19: Photo of the *Flower Pyramid* from the Louvre.

Fig. 20: *Pair of Shoes*, Imitating French (and pan-European) fashions.
Fig. 21: Decorative Object of Faience with Chinoiserie Decoration

Fig. 22: Wall Fountain with Cover and Basin, depicting Cherubs, Poseidon, and other European themes
Fig. 23: Charger with the Rape of Europa
Fig. 24: The original print of *The Rape of Europa*
LITERATURE CITATIONS:


OBJECT CITATIONS:

Heerema 41


*Plate, Painted with Chinoiserie Decoration*. ca.1680. Delftware faience, painted in enamel. H 63.5cm X w 92.0cm X d 1.5cm. Delft. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 


Van Eenhoorn, Lambertus (attributed). *Flower Pyramid*. ca. 1692-1700. Delftware faience. H 156.0cm X w 38.0cm X d 38.0cm. De Metaale Pot (attributed), Delft. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

