

# Delftware and the Domestication of Chinese Porcelain



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**Abstract** In contrast to scholarship that has emphasized a European exoticization of China in the early modern period, this essay focuses on the “domestication” of Chinese material culture through an examination of the Dutch reception and reproduction of Chinese porcelain. The term “domestication” is used here to explain the evolving identification of blue-and-white ceramics as a Dutch, rather than a Chinese, national product. Tracing almost 300 years of history, the essay argues that the quotidian domestic language with which Chinese porcelain was first described in Dutch texts, was replaced in the eighteenth century with concerns about the corrupting influences of porcelain, as it was displayed and imitated (in delftware) and exported to female consumers in eighteenth-century England. Following a period of neglect and decline, delftware was rediscovered by Dutch entrepreneurs and American tourists in the nineteenth century, who returned these blue-and-white wares to a benign domestic space. American writers, responding in part to the resurgence and promotion of the Dutch delftware industry, presented Dutch femininity and domesticity as a model of stability and harmony. None of these interpretations would have been possible, however, had the viability of delftware as a specifically “Dutch” material relied on only the physical properties of the earthenware body; instead, this essay argues, their interpretations depend upon the representational possibilities of the vessels’ painted surfaces, upon particular combinations of blue and white, to form an image of “Dutchness.”

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In response to the great popularity of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, but lacking the knowledge of how to produce porcelain themselves, the Dutch imitated that material in tin-glazed earthenware or delftware.<sup>1</sup> Using this historical case, I will demonstrate how a material's meaning can be manipulated and transformed through time and in various consumer contexts. How and why did a material that was a sign of the "Orient" come to represent indigenous European, specifically Dutch, aesthetics?<sup>2</sup> In contrast to scholarship that seeks to emphasize the European exoticization of China, I will focus on the prosaic manner in which Chinese porcelain was first discussed in seventeenth-century European texts. Not only descriptions of but also imitations of Chinese ceramics by Dutch craftsmen provide further evidence of a domestication of Chinese material culture, and convey information about the ways that the materiality of objects and their decoration conjoin to signal cultural specificity. The Dutch were not alone in their imitation of Chinese export wares; until Europeans discovered how to make porcelain in the first decades of the eighteenth century, other materials were used—Europe-wide—to imitate the imported goods. Those imitations took on a uniquely appealing aesthetic of their own, but one that could be configured differently in different European countries. In Dutch hands, porcelain-like material became a surface for representations from a variety of media, including oil painting, engraving, and architecture, drawing imagery from sources well beyond the decorative motifs found on Chinese porcelain. Once delftware was freed from the constraint of an "Oriental" referent, it was able to support a number of specifically Dutch visual types, which were then exported to other parts of Europe and America. In addition to the ceramics themselves, Dutch conventions for decorating with and displaying porcelain and porcelain-like materials also traveled beyond the country's borders and became sites around which ideals (and critiques) of European domestic life and feminine consumption were formed. By the nineteenth century, Dutch craftsmen and American tourists, self-consciously referencing the history of Asian porcelain in the Netherlands and earlier Dutch responses to these wares, repositioned delftware as a material perfectly suited to visualizing Dutch national identity.

This essay moves through almost 300 years of history as it traces the Dutch reception of Chinese porcelain in the seventeenth century, the English consumption of Dutch ceramics inspired by Chinese porcelain in the early eighteenth century, and following the decline of the Dutch tin-glazed ceramic industry, the rediscovery of delftware by Dutch entrepreneurs and American tourists in the nineteenth century. The long chronology of this investigation is unified and justified because an understanding of delftware's successful reincarnation in the nineteenth century depends in

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<sup>1</sup>I employ the popular term delftware to refer to blue-and-white tin-glazed earthenware (also called faience) produced not only in the city of Delft but throughout the Dutch republic in the seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup>Others have noted this transformation, see for example, Julie Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 122 and Julie Hochstrasser, "Wisselwerkingen Redux—Ceramics, Asia, and the Netherlands," in *Points of Contact: Crossing Cultural Boundaries*, ed. Amy Golahny (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004).

part upon the nineteenth-century consumer's knowledge of the material's historical associations. In addition, and more important in terms of my larger argument, this essay focuses on delftware's materiality through an investigation of the ways that its decorated surface reinforces but also competes with the associations of its ceramic body, depending upon the contexts of its temporal (for example, the seventeenth as opposed to the nineteenth century) and geographic (English as opposed to American) consumption.

I employ the concept of "domestication" to provide a new model for understanding the reception of Chinese visual culture in seventeenth-century Europe, one that allows for the presentation of porcelain and porcelain-like ceramics not as exotic objects but as surfaces and materials made conventional within European domestic spaces.<sup>3</sup> In addition, "domestication" refers to the evolving identification of blue-and-white ceramics as a specifically Dutch, rather than Chinese, national product. As delftware and Dutch conventions for the display of porcelain moved from the Netherlands to England, English writers further "domesticated" the material in terms of its "Dutchness" by uniting femininity with the consumption of porcelain and porcelain-like ceramics, and positioning the Netherlands as the corrupt origin of "female china lovers."<sup>4</sup> In order to return blue-and-white wares to a more benign domestic space, nineteenth-century American writers, responding in part to the resurgence and promotion of the Dutch delftware industry, presented Dutch femininity and domesticity as models of stability and harmony. Neither the English nor the American interpretations would have been possible, however, had the viability of delftware as a specifically "Dutch" material relied on only the physical properties of the earthenware body; instead, their interpretations depend upon the representational possibilities of the vessels' painted surfaces, upon particular combinations of blue and white, to form an image of "Dutchness."

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<sup>3</sup>In a recently published essay Anne Gerritsen also employs the term "domestication" to explore the embodied experiences that result when objects from overseas are brought into seventeenth-century Dutch domestic spaces. She concludes that "Through physical proximity, these global goods produce a version of Dutchness that is global yet domesticated, and exotic yet familiar; 'other' in the past, but self in the present." Anne Gerritsen, "Domesticating Goods from Overseas: Global Material Culture in the Early Modern Netherlands," *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (2016): 232. Kristel Smentek makes similar claims about the French reception and reframing of Chinese monochrome porcelain. Kristel Smentek, *Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* (New York: Frick Collection, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>The term "female china lover" is employed by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace in "Women, China and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 2 (Winter 1995/1996): 153–67.

## Destroying Myths and Domesticating Porcelain

The quantity of East Asian porcelain imported into Europe in the early modern period was enormous. It is estimated that 300 million pieces were shipped from Asia to Europe between 1499 and 1799; forty-three million of these were imported by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) alone in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and of the official VOC shipments, three million porcelain objects circulated primarily in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> These statistics allow us to imagine the volume of porcelain pieces inundating Europe in the early modern period but provide little context for how European consumers, and the Dutch specifically, understood the meaning and value of porcelain. In contrast to earlier descriptions of Asia, which tend to emphasize the “magical” properties of Chinese porcelains, accounts published in the seventeenth-century Netherlands often describe porcelain (and other aspects of East Asian material culture) in more mundane, pragmatic and familiar terms, conveying the production and utility of porcelain in language that made it “at home” in Dutch domestic interiors.

Bartolomeu dos Mártires (1514–1590) exemplified the earlier, more exoticized, tradition of writing about porcelain when, in conversation with Pope Pius IV, he described the material in terms that present it as more precious than rare stones and minerals: “The clay is so fine and transparent that the whites outshine crystal and alabaster, and the pieces which are decorated in blue dumbfound the eyes, seeming a combination of alabaster and sapphires. . . They may be esteemed by the greatest princes for their delight and curiosity. . .”<sup>6</sup> Descriptions such as dos Mártires’ ask viewers to think of porcelain as a naturally occurring, rather than a human-made substance, one akin to valuable gems, nautilus shells, and peacock feathers. But in keeping with the generally more prosaic seventeenth-century approach to Chinese visual culture, the qualities of Chinese porcelain that prompted early writers to draw allusions between it and natural rarities from distant shores fade from later descriptions of China. Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1563–1611), for example, acknowledges the elegance of the best Chinese porcelains, “. . . the finest are not allowed outside of the country on penalty of corporal punishment, but serve solely for the

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<sup>5</sup>Tijs Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, as recorded in the Dagb-registers of Batavia Castle, those of Hirado and Deshima, and other contemporary paper, 1602–1682* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 227. Volker’s text is central to an understanding of the VOC porcelain trade in East Asia; however, his estimate does not include those wares ordered privately. Although the trade in porcelain between China and Europe was important, China conducted an even more extensive intra-Asian trade. Chuimei Ho shows that in 1645 alone 229,000 pieces of porcelain were sold to the Japanese. Europe never comprised more than 31 percent of the Chinese porcelain trade and this only for the brief period from 1645 to 1661, while the South Seas and Japan claimed in general over 80 percent of the trade. See Chuimei Ho, “The Ceramic Trade in Asia, 1602–82,” in *Japanese Industrialization and the Asian Economy*, ed. Heita Kawakatsu and John Latham (London: Routledge, 1994), 37–8. For more on the VOC porcelain trade in East Asia, see also Christian J.A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (the Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Maria Antonia Pinto de Matos, “The Portuguese Trade,” *Oriental Art* 45, no. 1 (1999): 27.

lords and governors of the country, and are so fine that there is no crystalline glass to match it.”<sup>7</sup> On the same page, however, Linschoten continues by describing porcelain and the process of its making in terms that stress a human hand—or more often, human hands working together in a factory-like setting—and disavows the more supernatural stories of porcelain’s origin.<sup>8</sup> Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) echoes Linschoten’s tone as well as his content when he writes:

The ordinary tableware of the Chinese is clay pottery. It is not clear to me why it is called porcelain in Europe. There is nothing like it in European pottery either from the standpoint of the material itself or its thin and fragile construction. The finest specimens of porcelain are made from clay found in the province of *Kiam*, and these are shipped not only to every part of China but even to the remotest corners of Europe where they are highly prized by those who appreciate elegance at their banquets rather than pompous display. This porcelain, too, will bear the heat of hot foods without cracking and, what is more to be wondered at, if it is broken and sewed with a brass wire it will hold liquids without any leakage.<sup>9</sup>

Like Linschoten, Ricci acknowledges the elegance and fragility of porcelain’s shell-like body, but his description contains more mundane observations as well—among these, the ceramic’s impermeability to liquid, ability to hold hot foods without cracking, and even its aesthetic reserve, which is appreciated by those who covet elegance “rather than pompous display.”<sup>10</sup> While both authors note the beauty of porcelain, particularly in terms of its thin crystalline walls, they stress the craft that goes into its making and overtly discount stories, which had circulated for some time in Europe, about porcelain’s magical origins. One of the most alarming of these myths suggested that porcelain was made from a “clay” of ground-up human bones. This story was repudiated by Alvaro de Semedo (1585–1658), among others, who assures readers that:

In this work [porcelain] there are not those mysteries that are reported of it, neither in the matter, the form, nor the manner of working; they [porcelains] are made absolutely of the earth, but of a neat and excellent quality. They are made in the same time and in the same manner as our earthen vessels, only they make them with more diligence and accurateness.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien 1579–1592: Eerste stuk*, ed. H. Kern, rev. by H. Terpstra (the Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 97.

*Die porceleynen, dieder ghemaect worden, is onghelooftick te vertrecken, ende die daer jaerlicks uytghetrocken worden naer Indien, Portugael ende Nieu Spaengien ende ander weggen; maer die fijnste en mogen uyt het landt niet ghevoert werden op lijfstraffe, dan dienen alleenelick voor die heeren ende regierders van 't landt, welcke zijn so fijn, dat gheen cristalyne glas daer by te gelijcken is* (Translation mine).

<sup>8</sup>van Linschoten, *Itinerario*, 97.

<sup>9</sup>Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583–1610*, trans. L.J. Gallagher, S.J. (New York: Random House, 1953), 14–5. Gallagher’s text is a translation of Matteo Ricci’s journals, which were first published in an edited and translated (from Italian to Latin) version by Nicolas Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg: Christoph Mangium, 1615). Ricci’s description of the “brass wire” (*filo aereo* in Trigault’s text, page 14) used to mend broken porcelain is the kind of specific, objective, and unadorned detail that sets Ricci’s text apart from more popular descriptions of Chinese “marvels” and, as noted by this essay’s anonymous reader, may refer to the Chinese use of heated iron staples to repair porcelain.

<sup>10</sup>Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 15.

<sup>11</sup>Alvaro Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China: wherein all the particular provinces are accurately described, as also the dispositions, manners, learning, laws,*

Slightly later, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), when writing about Japanese porcelain, also notes that the earth from which the pots are made is itself firm and clean, but much kneading, cutting and rinsing is necessary to reach the kind of perfection that makes it possible to produce fine, transparent porcelain. “That is how the old tale originated that fine porcelain requires human bones.”<sup>12</sup>

Earlier descriptions of China had also suggested that porcelain was created not by high temperature firing in a kiln but from being buried for decades, even centuries, and that the earth itself—or entombment in it—transforms the common clay into porcelain. Again, and in contrast to these earlier stories, Linschoten’s text provides a more nuanced and practical explanation:

These porcelains are made inland of a certain earth that is very hard, which is pounded to pieces or ground, and they leave it to soak in troughs cut out of stone, and when it is well soaked and frequently stirred, as milk is churned to make butter, they make of that which floats on top the finest work. . . and then they are dried and baked in the kiln.<sup>13</sup>

Like Kaempfer and others, Linschoten emphasizes the similarities between the creation of porcelain and the making of bread, butter, and other kitchen products. Porcelain is “churned,” as one churns milk, then it is worked and kneaded, and finally it is baked in an oven-like kiln. By drawing associations between the production of porcelain and daily tasks familiar to any Dutch housekeeper, Linschoten subdues the magic of porcelain and describes its creation in terms that make it akin to the activities of European domestic life.

The physical qualities of glazed porcelain, its smooth, easily-wiped surface and impermeability to liquids, make porcelain a “cleaner” material than wood, earthenware, or pewter, a trait celebrated by writers who otherwise adopt a more reserved view on porcelain’s manufacture and origins.<sup>14</sup> This is a position echoed by the playful text decorating a delftware plate: “Pewter plates are no good/because one has to scrub them/but a plate of porcelain/Gets from washing white and clean/there for arrange upon the table/rather a plate that is painted well.”<sup>15</sup>

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*militia, government, and religion of the people, together with the traffick and commodities of that country* (London: E. Tyler for John Crook, 1655), 19.

<sup>12</sup>Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer’s Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, ed. and trans. B.M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 293.

<sup>13</sup>van Linschoten, *Itinerario*, 97.

*Dese porseleynen worden ghemaect te landewaerts binnen, van een seker aerde, die seer hert is, welcke wordt aen stucken gestooten ofte ghemalen, ende latent dan in backen van ghehouwen steen, daer toe ghemaect, in water weycken, ende alst wel gheweyckt ende dickwils gheroert is, gelijck als men die melck karent om die botter te maken, so makense daer na van het ghene, dat boven drijft, het alderfijnste werck, ende daer nae wat onderder grover, ende alsoo naer venant, ende schilderense ende makender die figueren ende conterfeysels op, diese willen, ende werden also ghedrooght ende inden oven gebacken* (Translation mine).

<sup>14</sup>Although glazed earthenware is also impermeable to liquid, early seventeenth-century earthenware bodies were, in general, heavier than porcelain bodies and more prone to chipping.

<sup>15</sup>Frits Scholten, *Dutch Majolica & Delftware, 1550–1700: The Edwin van Drecht collection. Exhibited in the Paleis Lange Voorhout Museum, The Hague* (Amsterdam: E. van Drecht, 1993),

## Delftware's Surface Imitation

It is precisely the material qualities of porcelain—its light, strong, translucent, white body—that Dutch manufacturers, and European potters in general, were not able to imitate. Although Linschoten's and Ricci's texts tell us a great deal about how porcelain is made, they do not provide the precise recipe for porcelain clay. This information would remain secret until the first decades of the eighteenth century when Francois Xavier Dentrecolles (1664–1741), a Jesuit missionary and early modern “industrial spy,” made close observations of Chinese potters at Jingdezhen, where he discovered, and quickly conveyed to Europe, the specific types and combinations of clay that were required to produce the thin, translucent bodies in such demand at home.<sup>16</sup> The history of a European search for the “secret of porcelain” has been well documented and acknowledges a number of motivations, from the alchemical to the mercantile, behind the quest. My focus is not on the history of the replication of the porcelain body but rather on the Dutch imitation of Chinese porcelain's surface appearance, on the ways that Dutch potters referenced the materiality of porcelain by decorating earthenware bodies with particular combinations of color and form.

Dutch merchants amassed great profits by transporting Chinese porcelain to Europe, but for Dutch potters, the circulation of millions of pieces of Chinese porcelain within their country challenged their conventional practices. Some of the potters who thrived in the wake of Chinese imports embraced the production of cheap pots, which were marketed in great volume and formed of coarse and poorly mixed clay, with simple designs and crude painting. Others went in another direction and aimed to produce ceramics that matched the elegance of their Chinese models which came to be known as *Hollants porcelyen*.<sup>17</sup> Through a variety of purification techniques that refined their previously “fatty” clays—techniques used by potters in Delft as early as the 1620s—Dutch potters discovered how to produce thinner and more porcelain-like earthenware bodies. But even these vessels could not match the lightweight and refined texture of Chinese porcelain. By applying an opaque white tin glaze over the surface of the vessel and creating a canvas for painted decoration—formed of colors derived from metal oxides, above all cobalt which produced a deep blue—tin-glazed Dutch earthenware was able to imitate the appearance if not the material of China's most famous ceramics. The opaque tin glaze was not itself an innovation; it had been used in Italian majolica since the sixteenth century and also

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32. Pewter, in contrast to porcelain, requires scouring to clean, which often results in pitted and scratched surfaces that hold dirt.

<sup>16</sup>François Xavier Dentrecolles, *Lettre du pere d'Entrecolles missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, sur la porcelaine, au pere Orry de la même Compagnie* (Amsterdam: Jean Frederic Bernard, 1738). For more on “espionage” as it relates to porcelain, see Lydia He Liu, “Robinson Crusoe's Earthenware Pot,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1998): 728–57.

<sup>17</sup>For more on the term “Dutch porcelain,” see Jan-Daan van Dam, *Delftse porceleyn: Dutch Delftware 1620–1850* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2004), 14.

by majolica potters in the Netherlands before the arrival of Chinese porcelain in large quantities. The innovation was in the kinds of motifs and decorative forms, originally inspired by Chinese prototypes, which were created from this combination of white tin and cobalt blue. Over time, the white glazed earthenware surface became a space not only for the imitation of decorative forms derived from Chinese porcelain, but also a place for the reproduction of imagery from a number of media, including intaglio print, written texts, and oil painting.

This emphasis on the ceramic vessel's surface as an entity separate from the material qualities of the body is echoed in the work of Johan Nieuhof (1618–1672), one of the most influential travel book writers on China in the seventeenth century. His text, which was written fifty years before Dentrecolles' discovery, is concerned not with the secret of porcelain clay but rather with the secret of the painting on the pot's surface:

Upon the vessels, which are made of this earth, they know how to paint all kinds of animals, flowers, and trees very deftly and artistically with indigo or *weed* (that in the southern landscapes occurs in great abundance). And this art, of painting on porcelain, they keep so hidden that they will not teach it to anyone but their children, friends, or other relations. The Chinese are also so dexterous and swift in this painting, that one cannot show them an animal or plant, which they cannot copy (or mimic) on porcelain.<sup>18</sup>

This dexterous Chinese style was described in *daghregisters* (journals and letters produced by VOC administrators) as “fine and curious.”<sup>19</sup> The phrase is one of the few that gives us any sense of how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century viewers might have articulated the appeal of porcelain in aesthetic terms, not simply as useful, “clean” three-dimensional objects but also as surfaces for representation. However, “curious,” particularly when it is used to describe China in the seventeenth-century, is a complex and multi-faceted term that was employed by European intellectuals engaged with a study of Chinese history and culture as well as by merchants concerned with the acquisition of Chinese objects. When “curious” appears in seventeenth-century travel books about China it can often be read as “careful” and “considered,” relating to method, as well as “worthy of note,” or exotic.<sup>20</sup> Johan

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<sup>18</sup>Johannes Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, ann den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China*. . . (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665), 91.

Op de vaten, die van deze aarde gemaakt zyn, wetenze allerlei slagh van dieren bloemen en boomen zeer aardig en kunstig met Indigo of Weed (dat in de Zuiderlijke Landschappen in grooten overvloed voort komt) te schilderen. En deze kunst, van op Porcelain te schilderen, houdenze ook zoo verborgen, datze die aan niemant, dan aan hunne kinderen, vrienden, of nakomelingen, willen leeren. De Sineezen zyn ook zoo vaerdig en gaauw in dit schilderen, dat men hen geen gedaante van dier of kruidt vertoonen zal, of zy weten dat op het Porcelain na te bootzen (Translation mine).

<sup>19</sup>Volker, *Porcelain*, 143, quotes a letter from Batavia to Deshima dated June 21, 1662, “Your Honour shall look to it that everything is fine and curious as to painting. . .”

<sup>20</sup>See David Mugello, *Curious Land. Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989) for use of the term *curiosus* and its relationship to seventeenth-century scholarly work on China. For recent examinations of the early modern preoccupation with curiosity, see Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern*



Nieuhof, for example, frequently describes Chinese architecture and Chinese objects as “curious” in passages that go on to enumerate the fine, detailed, and skillfully constructed qualities of Chinese structures and material goods.<sup>21</sup>

Lacking substantial seventeenth-century written sources that directly address the aesthetics of porcelain as they circulated within the Dutch republic, we must turn to evidence presented by the objects themselves and consider how Chinese porcelain was translated visually by Dutch artists, both painters on and painters of ceramics, in order to better understand what the product, as a material, signified. My aim is to decouple Chinese porcelain, and delftware painted in a Chinese manner, from an undifferentiated vocabulary of the “exotic” and instead consider the representational possibilities that were presented to Europeans when porcelain and porcelain-like earthenware became associated with Dutch domestic interiors.

The wars in China that marked the transition from the Ming (1368–1644) to the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties caused a disruption of porcelain production and a severe decline in porcelain imports to Europe, particularly in the years between 1657 and 1681.<sup>22</sup> As Christiaan Jörg and Jan-Daan van Dam have shown, Dutch potters, particularly those working in Delft, reacted quickly to the change in trade patterns caused by the Chinese civil wars and expanded production to create high-quality earthenware pieces that would satisfy Dutch consumers’ taste for Chinese porcelain.<sup>23</sup> But how did the Dutch understand “Chineseness” in decoration? Although scholars often claim that the Dutch “exactly” copied Chinese prototypes, two plates (Figs. 1 and 2), one created in China and the other in Holland, give us a sense of how closely delftware could adhere to a Chinese model and also demonstrate the ways that these imitations strayed from the originals.

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*Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Neil Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Robert John Weston Evans and Alexander Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). For use of the term “curious” and its application to art, see Peter Parshall, “Introduction. Art and Curiosity in Northern Europe,” *Word & Image* 11, no. 4 (1995): 327–32; and Christopher Wood “‘Curious Pictures’ and the Art of Description,” *Word & Image* 11, no. 4 (1995): 332–52.

<sup>21</sup>John Nieuhoff, *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*. . . (London: John Ogilby, 1673), 45, 102, 106, and 120. Nieuhof also uses “curious” in ways that suggest it may be understood as similar to “particular” or “fastidious” as on page 168 “not curious in their diet, for they eat all manner of flesh without difference” and on page 177 “in the preserving [who may be buried in gravesites] whereof they are “very curious, insomuch that none other are admitted to be Interr’d there. . .” While the English translation of Nieuhof’s text employs the word “curious,” the earlier Dutch (Nieuhof 1665) and French (Nieuhof 1665) editions use terms such as *duur* (expensive/costly), *aardig* (pleasant/nice), and *waardig* (worthy/dignified).

<sup>22</sup>Volker, *Porcelain*, 60.

<sup>23</sup>van Dam, *Delftse*, 18; and Christian J.A. Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics: Oriental Porcelain & Delftware* (Hong Kong: the Council, 1984), 19. Jörg writes, “Where there were only three or four faience factories in Delft in 1647, there were already twenty or more in 1661, while in the last quarter of the century faience was being made in over thirty factories, most of it painted in Chinese style.”



**Fig. 1** Unknown artist, *Porcelain painted in underglaze cobalt blue*, c. 1595–1625. Jingdezhen, China. Porcelain. Diameter: 21 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum

The Chinese porcelain piece (1595–1625, Fig. 1) was made in the ceramic center of Jingdezhen and is decorated in underglaze cobalt blue. The Dutch earthenware plate, also decorated with cobalt blue, was made approximately 50 years later (1690–1700). The plates are different in size (the Chinese dish is 21 cm in diameter, the Dutch plate is 39.3 cm) and the colors are different in tone, but the patterning follows a similar division along the rim and surrounds a large central motif in the basin of the vessels that is typical of *kraak* wares. Possibly derived from “Carrack,” the Dutch word for a type of Portuguese merchant ship, the term *kraak* refers to Chinese porcelains that were mass-produced for export to Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia from the 1570s onwards. Although both plates display the *kraak* panel-bordered rim, the decoration is not identical in its details.<sup>24</sup> There are

<sup>24</sup>Although Jörg suggests (Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics*, 142) that a Dutch vessel is a “literal imitation” of a *kraak* porcelain bottle, a comparison of the two vessels he cites provides an additional example of similar but not identical decoration.



**Fig. 2** Unknown artist, *Tin-glazed earthenware painted with tin-glaze blue*, c. 1680–1700. Gift of Madame Roux-Berger in memory of her husband. Delft, Netherlands. Tin-glazed earthenware/ Faience. Diameter: 39.3 cm. Sèvres, Cité de la Céramique

differences in the positioning and form of the birds' bodies, in the specific motifs and segmentation of the rim decoration, and especially in the creation of illusionistic space in the bowl of the vessels. In the Chinese dish, as in Chinese landscape painting, the watery terrain inhabited by the birds moves not back into space but rather up, as if layers of space were piled one on top of the other so that the viewer's eye travels up the plate as it looks from foreground to background. In contrast, in the Dutch example, by providing flowers and rocks that diminish in size as one looks from the birds' shoreline to the rocky shoreline of the background, the Dutch painter creates a sense of depth more in keeping with European standards of perspective.

Although the painter of the Dutch plate was clearly imitating a Chinese prototype, the image painted on the vessel was modified through the lens of culturally specific conventions for picturing space. Even in this closely matched comparison, the Dutch work appears to capture the "feel" rather than the "rightness" of the original.<sup>25</sup> These are Claire Corbellier's terms and they point us toward the ways that we might understand early delftware as equivalent in intention and spirit to Chinese porcelain rather than as an exact copy of it. Her analysis also calls into question, as do the

<sup>25</sup>Claire Corbellier, "China into Delft: A Note on Visual Translation," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 6 (February 1968): 269–76.

works themselves, the degree to which artists are able to “see” in Chinese terms and to fully adopt Chinese conventions of picturing. In this comparison, there is little evidence that Dutch potters were self-consciously attempting to distinguish themselves from their Chinese models, instead the differences appear to be the result of an imperfect translation. But in other examples, Dutch potters overtly separate themselves from Chinese prototypes to create works that signal “Dutchness” and Dutch craft, rather than “Chineseness.”

In addition, Jan-Daan van Dam’s important work on the legal dispute between father and son potters, Willem and Gerrit Verstraeten, suggests that the term “Dutch porcelain” could be used in the seventeenth century to specify types of decoration rather than material, creating a distinction between surface and body rather than between national origin and clay composition. As van Dam notes:

On 26 February, Hendrick van Gogh testified that “he knew in truth that everything that is called porcelain (and is made here) that the same must be painted all over, and that what was painted with little wreaths or with little manikins or with coats of arms, that the same was called white goods”... The three men stated that white goods were faience with a small amount of decoration and that “porcelain” was faience with full decoration. The last two statements on the father’s behalf only speak to the decoration whereas the son evidently asserted that all the better made flatware (in other words faience) was called “Dutch porcelain,” irrespective of the decoration.<sup>26</sup>

As Michael Archer suggests, there is no indication that seventeenth-century European producers of porcelain-like ceramics employed the terms “earthenware” (faience) or “porcelain” based upon differences of material or geographical origin (the Netherlands as opposed to China). “Evidence confirming this can be found in van Hamme’s patent application of 1676, which refers to the ‘Art of making tiles and porcelane and other earthen wares, after the way practiced in Holland.’”<sup>27</sup>

By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as delftware more completely distanced itself from its Chinese models, the medium no longer stood as a substitute for the Chinese original but became a new and independent commodity, one that was capable of displaying the artistry and technical sophistication of Dutch, as opposed to Chinese, craftsmen.<sup>28</sup> A still life painting by Cornelis de Man (1621–1706) depicts a blue-and-white lidded jar on a table covered with a carpet of Asian origin and juxtaposed with a boy of non-European origin and a multi-colored parrot (Fig. 3).<sup>29</sup> In this image, and unlike many other seventeenth-century still life

<sup>26</sup>van Dam, *Delftse*, 18.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Archer, *Delftware: The Tin-Glazed Earthenware of the British Isles, A Catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: The Stationery Office, 1997), 3.

<sup>28</sup>Maxine Berg makes a similar argument for British semi-luxury goods in the eighteenth century. Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45.

<sup>29</sup>van Dam, *Delftse*, 37, notes this painting as well. Lauren Craen’s (active c. 1643–1664) still life of 164(3?) also appears to depict a delftware jug. It is placed on a table with a lobster, crayfish and façon-de-Venise wine glass. The painting was recently sold at auction (Christies, November 7, 2001, Lot 77/Sale 2526).



**Fig. 3** Cornelis de Man (1621–1706), *Still Life with a Frankfurter Faience Vase*. Oil on panel. Frankfurt, Historisches Museum. Photo: Horst Ziegenfusz

paintings, the ceramic vessel in the work does not appear to be a piece of Chinese porcelain but rather an earthenware tin-glazed pot produced in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Its

<sup>30</sup>The size, shape, and decoration of this vase—particularly the ways that visual spaces are organized and divided, the clothing and posture of the figures, and the decoration within the cartouches—are consistent with ceramic pieces produced in Delft in the second half of the seventeenth century. The Historisches Museum Frankfurt has titled the painting *Still Life with Frankfurter Faience Vase*, but as Jan Daniël van Dam has argued, “Much of the faience preserved in Germany with a decoration derived from Chinese porcelain was, from about 1920, attributed by German art historians to the faience factory in Frankfurt. In reality, though, this faience was made in Delft, partly as an export product for German courts. On statistical grounds alone, a substantial technically excellent and varied production was impossible in Frankfurt: one factory with an estimated 30 employees could obviously never have made more than the over 20 [Delft] factories with an estimated 1500 employees.” van Dam, *Delftse*, 37.

presence reminds the viewer that not all blue-and-white ceramics depicted in still life paintings are of East Asian origin and that indigenous production of these wares was also celebrated in Dutch art. By recognizing a Dutch hand in crafting blue-and-white ceramics, still life paintings that contain delftware pieces offer a further sign of the domestication of Chinese porcelain and expand seventeenth-century ideas of “exoticism” and cross-cultural contact. These paintings suggest that not only foreign things, but also Dutch things made in a foreign manner held status in Netherlandish society. Works like de Man’s complicate ideas of how Dutch cosmopolitanism is both materialized and visualized, and offer the possibility that foreign objects do not always remain “other” but are instead translated and re-interpreted, in their representation as well as in their physical presence, within Dutch domestic spaces.

### **Delftware Tiles: Flattened Objects and Pictorial Space**

In addition to objects intended for use, such as tableware, seventeenth-century potteries produced objects intended for display. The line of demarcation between these two realms is permeable but it is clear that some ceramic objects are much less like vessels and much more like paintings than others. However, the qualities of durability and cleanliness, which had made Chinese porcelain tableware so appealing to Dutch housekeepers, are also the qualities that made tile pictures attractive as an element of interior decoration for consumers across Europe.<sup>31</sup> Tile pictures were especially well suited to the heat and humidity of kitchens, entrance halls, and other places where the walls would receive a great deal of wear. In addition, these “painting-like” ceramic tile pictures build upon the representational aspect of imitative Dutch earthenware and derive their meaning not only from the images they present but also from the material upon which they are painted, not canvas, but clay. Blue-and-white painted earthenware became a surface for representation and reproduction of imagery across media. This is true in the Chinese tradition in terms of how print intersects with porcelain and also in Europe as delftware expands to include “paintings” composed of porcelain tiles.

Although, as discussed above, it is difficult to locate examples of perfect one-to-one matches between Dutch blue-and-white earthenware and Chinese porcelain, we do have many examples, both from the Chinese and the Dutch traditions, of ceramic decorations that copy, in some cases line for line, woodblock prints (in China) and engravings (in the Netherlands).<sup>32</sup> In the Dutch world, these examples become even

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<sup>31</sup>See van Dam, *Delftse*, 63, and Caroline Henriette de Jonge, *Dutch Tiles* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1971), 100, for assessments of Daniel Marot’s role in introducing new models for the display of porcelain and delftware in domestic interiors.

<sup>32</sup>For more on the relation between print and porcelain in Ming dynasty China, see Craig Clunas, “The West Chamber: A Literary Theme in Chinese Porcelain Decoration,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 46 (1981–1982): 69–86; Hsu Wen Chin Hsü, “Fictional Scenes on Chinese Transitional Porcelain (1620–ca. 1683) and Their Sources of Decoration,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 58 (1986): 1–146, and Stephen Little, “Narrative Themes and

more numerous when the shapes of ceramic objects are extended and flattened from rounded pots into tiles, plaques, and tile pictures. The flat surface enabled artists to more easily transfer engravings to the ceramic body by first pin-pricking a drawing, based upon or traced from an engraving, and pouncing powder through the pin-pricked holes to the tin-glazed surface beneath. The pounced design was then outlined with pigment and finally mineral-derived tints and colors were applied to complete the decoration. Pictorial tiles and plaques resulted in an explosion of imagery previously beyond the realm of ceramic decoration and, in many cases, derived from prints drawn from a variety of genres—landscape, seascape, portraiture, genre scene, still life, city views, and histories—that were also the focus of Dutch oil painters.<sup>33</sup> In the seventeenth century, pictorial plates, plaques, and tile pictures were made more abundantly in the Netherlands than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>34</sup> They became a kind of “popular picture gallery” for the mercantile community and were hung on the wall or embedded into a tiled wall, as one would display a painting.<sup>35</sup>

Seventy-eight tiles, decorated with numerous figures of seemingly East Asian and South American origin, compose the Rijksmuseum *Tile Panel with Chinese Ornament and Africans* (Fig. 4), which provides an example of Dutch ceramic tile work that on the one hand is almost unique in its specific combination of subject matter and technical prowess and, on the other hand, is not uncommon in the ways that even this “Chinese” subject speaks to a particular form of “Dutchness” that was appropriate in an elite European domestic setting. Among other striking aspects of this work, the rare depiction of black Brazilians, located in the center and lower right of the composition, has made the piece a focus of recent scholarship.<sup>36</sup> Beyond the Afro-Brazilian figures’ iconographic implications, the rendering of the deep black color that forms their bodies is a technical tour-de-force in keeping with the work’s overall more lively, relative to earlier

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Woodblock Prints in the Decoration of Seventeenth-Century Chinese Porcelains,” in *Seventeenth-Century Chinese Porcelain from the Butler Family Collection*, ed. Michael Butler (Alexandria: Art Services International, 1990), 21–33.

<sup>33</sup>van Dam, *Delftse*, also makes this point.

<sup>34</sup>Rotterdam, rather than Delft, was the center of the tile production and in some ways tile remained an industry separate from other forms of delftware production. Wall tiles had been a Dutch industry before Europeans encountered Chinese porcelain and some potters concentrated on this product, which was relatively unaffected by Chinese ceramic imports throughout the seventeenth century. For more on this issue, see van Dam, *Delftse*, 11. In addition, as Hans van Lemmen, *Delftware Tiles* (New York: Lawrence King, 1997), 35, explains, the idea of a tile picture is not a Dutch invention but the use of tiles by an expanding Dutch middle class was a new phenomenon and marked a new pattern of consumption in Europe.

<sup>35</sup>Plates were also displayed on racks, forming a different kind of “gallery.” See Alan Caiger-Smith, *Tin-glaze Pottery in Europe and the Islamic World; the Tradition of 1000 years in Maiolica, Faience & Delftware* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 136; van Lemmen, *Delftware*, 35.

<sup>36</sup>Caroline Henriette de Jonge, “Hollandse tegelkamers in Duitse en Franse kastelen,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 10 (1959): 161–3; Hendrik Enno van Gelder, “Het grote tegeltableau der Collectie Loudon,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 4, no. 4 (1956): 96–101. For a more recent discussion, see Esther Schreuder and Elmer Kolfin, ed., *Black is Beautiful* (Amsterdam: De Nieuwe Kerk, 2008), catalogue no. 32.



**Fig. 4** Unknown artist, *Tile panel with Chinese ornament and Africans*, c. 1690–1730. Tin-glazed earthenware/Faience. 170 × 79 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



delftware, and challenging color scheme. Floating unmoored against the white background and decoupled from a clear narrative, the black figures' presence in this work not only adds to the general sense of a foreign and exotic scene but also becomes a vehicle for expressing the artistry of Dutch potters. Moving beyond Chinese blue-and-white models, the panel is an example of the Dutch response to Japanese multicolor *imari* wares, which were imported into the Netherlands as a substitute for Chinese porcelain during the mid-seventeenth-century transitional period, when exports from China were disrupted.<sup>37</sup> Striking in color and size (170 × 79 cm), the tile panel frustrates viewers who aim to find a legible narrative within it, in part because the panel derives its imagery from a number of different and competing media, and references a variety of cultures and artistic traditions. The black figures and their relation to Albert Eckhout's paintings of Brazilians have already been noted and much discussed, but the larger theme of the tile picture appears to be "China." To modern viewers the panel's iconography is almost incoherent but the very diversity of imagery and media that are source material for this panel is evidence of the complex visual vocabulary that seventeenth-century viewers had at their disposal in imagining foreign places and imitating foreign things.

As others have observed, individual scenes of the panel look as if they may have been motivated, or even "abstracted," from Chinese porcelain decoration, which, as noted above, has its own prototypes in woodblock print illustration. The most obvious difference between these possible models and the tile panel is that, in either porcelain decoration or print illustration, the image would more likely be a single vignette rather than a large composition, as in the case of the panel. And although each of the scenes in the panel looks as if it might have been based on "quotations" from porcelain or print, compositional and iconographic awkwardness elide any particular identity. For example, the figure sitting on a large lotus flower descending from the top right corner initially strikes the viewer as a Buddhist deity, and has often been identified more specifically as the benevolent Guanyin. The figure pours water from a vessel—a trope that may be related to purification—yet there is no recipient of the water, for the scenes below are unrelated to the descending deity. Instead the flowing water is depicted as falling into a diamond-shaped pattern that fits neatly between the diagonal thrust of the upraised banner to the left and the curling point of the pavilion to the right. The flowing water makes design rather than narrative sense. It appears then that although the individual vignettes in the panel may be based on pictorial models found in Chinese woodblock prints and/or on decorated porcelain, the selection of the scenes is decided by the design of the tile's overall composition rather than by any unified narrative.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>For more on *imari* and delftware, see Frits Scholten, "Vroege japonaierie in Delft, 1660–1680," *Mededelingenblad van de Nederlandse Vereniging Vrienden van de Ceramiek* 128, no. 3 (1987): 17–25.

<sup>38</sup>My interpretation of the panel has benefited from discussions with Wei-Cheng Lin and Bonnie Cheng. Although there is no evidence that Dutch artists would have been aware of this model, the composition of the tile panel—its proportions, rendering of space, and the inscription contained in the cartouche rectangle at the top left of the image—is strikingly similar to Chinese cave temple murals. Temple murals in late imperial China were often composed of narrative vignettes, usually based on stories found in sutras, which unfolded within a larger composition and could be read in conjunction with an inscription.

The Rijksmuseum tile panel resonates with Chinese painting because its status as a three-dimensional object, its ability to be held and moved, has been almost completely erased, as the tile is now sutured to the wall and, barring force, inseparable from it. Despite the light grid of lines that mark the spaces where the tiles meet and which remains visible even from a distance—reminding the viewer of the panel’s material qualities and fracturing the illusion of a unified whole—the tiles are first and foremost a support for the images positioned across them, a surface for display and an aspect of interior decoration. Visually, the panel is the logical conclusion of the referential qualities found in earlier blue-and-white Dutch earthenware vessels. It presents a “picture of” China without allusion to being an object from China, firmly fixing its status as a representation and thus creating a surface upon which to demonstrate Dutch artistry.<sup>39</sup> As a “picture of” this tile panel, and others like it, also encourages a distanced viewing that moves earthenware from being a material for the creation of utilitarian objects to a material for the creation of surfaces across which artists appropriate and re-position imagery from other media and other cultures. While celebrating the “Orient,” the panel also domesticates the porcelain that first brought these exotic Asian images to the Dutch republic by transforming a pseudo-porcelain material into a vehicle for the display of Dutch, rather than Chinese, craftsmanship.

## The “Dutch Taste” and Female China Lovers

In its original context, the Rijksmuseum panel may have occupied a wall similar to the one in the kitchen of the Amalienburg pavilion at Nymphenburg Palace, designed by Francois Cuvillies between 1734 and 1739, which is decorated with a tile picture very like the Rijksmuseum work, minus the Brazilian figures.<sup>40</sup> Because the Amalienburg panel is in situ near Munich, it allows us to expand an analysis of how Chinese imagery and a Chinese material—porcelain—were domesticated both commercially, in the sense of being brought “home” to the Netherlands, where they were then imitated to promote Dutch artistry across Europe, and physically, as china was made a common component of the decoration of European domestic spaces,

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<sup>39</sup>As Maxine Berg argues, the practice of “imitation” was fundamental to the production of material goods that had at their heart an “economy of delight” and of “modern luxuries.” “[These products] relied upon a perception of the exotic and oriental provenance of traditional luxury goods. . . . Sometimes substitutes, but more frequently quite new commodities, their production processes were to be marked by skill, technique, variety and artistry. These attributes were also perceived at the time to be the principles underlying the success of oriental luxuries.” Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 45.

<sup>40</sup>The content of the Amalienburg image is even less coherent to modern eyes than the Rijksmuseum panel, for many of the Amalienburg tiles appear to be wrongly placed and the composition disrupted.

particularly those spaces associated with feminine realms such as kitchens and parlors.<sup>41</sup>

Within the Dutch republic, earthenware tiles were first valued for domestic use because of the physical properties of their material, the same properties that had made Chinese porcelain so attractive. Their impermeability to liquids and their surface that was easy to wipe clean, meant that they were often used to decorate baseboards, fireplace surrounds, and other spaces within the home that required frequently cleaning. By the early 1600s, simply decorated blue-and-white tiles were available for approximately twenty-five guilders per thousand, which would have allowed a tradesman to embellish the kitchen-parlor of his home for the equivalent of three weeks' wages.<sup>42</sup> By the late seventeenth century, however, the Dutch market for simple blue-and-white tile became primarily a rural rather than an urban one, a taste associated with "old fashioned" and conservative values.<sup>43</sup> Between 1670 and 1800, the high quality, technically innovative tiles produced in Holland (of which the Amalienburg and Rijksmuseum panels are examples) no longer aimed to satisfy a home market but were instead positioned as an export appealing to a luxury market. German, Russian, French, and Polish aristocrats ordered tile pictures, or entire tile rooms, from Dutch manufacturers, prompted in part by the unparalleled technical refinement achieved by Dutch craftsmen. As Caroline Henriette de Jonge notes, the 1677 marriage of William of Orange to Mary Stuart helped to make the continental fashion for tin-glazed tile pictures popular among the English aristocracy as well.<sup>44</sup> As with the imitation of Chinese porcelain in the early seventeenth-century Netherlands, the true value of delftware tile may be measured in terms of its imitation beyond the Dutch Republic, in the works of German, Danish and French craftsmen who attempted to copy the look, if not precisely the fine clay body, of the original Dutch product. By the late seventeenth century, Holland was so closely associated with decorated ceramics, both their creation and their display, that European consumers outside of the Netherlands identified not only tile pictures but also any large

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<sup>41</sup>Although the aesthetic qualities of porcelain were appreciated in the seventeenth century, porcelain as interior decoration belongs to the eighteenth century. See Volker, *Porcelain*, 25.

<sup>42</sup>As quoted in Simon Schama, *An Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 318.

<sup>43</sup>"... after 1700 the market for tiles within the Netherlands was exclusively rural. Sales in the cities were negligible," Jan-Daam van Dam, *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984), 29. "Such flexibility [to produce fewer and more expensive tiles depending on demand] enabled Dutch tile-makers to deal with orders from abroad, particularly when changing fashions in interior decoration led to a decline in the market for tiles in the urban areas of Holland towards the end of the seventeenth century," van Lemmen, *Delftware*, 1997. Not only delftware tiles but also Chinese porcelain generally fell out of fashion in the Netherlands by the late seventeenth century, "... porcelain, once the sensation of the public sales and eagerly sought by Hollander and foreigner alike for a high price and in 1619 still a 'curiosity,' had 63 years later come down to a merchandise of so little importance to the Company as hardly to be worth mention and auctioned off with more important goods." Volker, *Porcelain*, 18–9.

<sup>44</sup>de Jonge, *Dutch*, 90–1.

massing of porcelain as “Dutch.”<sup>45</sup> Whether porcelain from China or its delftware imitation, blue-and-white pottery had become a sign of Dutch national identity.<sup>46</sup>

This “Dutch taste” was not, however, a wholly positive designation. The further porcelain and porcelain-like ceramics moved from being strictly utilitarian commodities, and the more closely they were tied to interior decoration and massed display, the more often these materials were perceived as degenerate and potentially dangerous. In addition, by at least the middle of the eighteenth century, porcelain and other elite ceramics, which had been associated with positive aspects of domesticity (for example, cleanliness) when circulating internally in the Netherlands, became, as export goods, conflated with the worst aspects of femininity and consumerism within the increasingly fraught realm of the domestic.<sup>47</sup> In locations outside of the Dutch republic, the trope of the “female china lover” was used to signal an ongoing debate about the role of women in the economy.<sup>48</sup> In England, chinaware and the women

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<sup>45</sup>See, for example, the Arundel Castle Archives of 1641, as discussed in Juliet Claxton, “The Countess of Arundel’s Dutch Pranketing Room,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 22, no. 2 (2010): 187–96. In France and England, the term *chiminées hollandaises* was used to describe any shelved arrangement of porcelain. For more on the “Dutchness” of tea drinking and porcelain collecting, see Roger G. Panetta, ed., *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture* (Yonkers: Fordham University Press, 2010), 280–1; van Lemmen, *Delftware*, 70, “In an entry for 1695, the English diarist Celia Fiene (fl. 1685–1712) used the words ‘Delft-Ware Closet’ in a description of a small room in Queen Mary’s Water Gallery at Hampton Court. This room was filled with a display of Dutch blue-and-white pottery and Chinese porcelain and had tiles made in Delft on the walls.” Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 56, cites Daniel Defoe, who blamed Queen Mary for introducing into England “the custom. . . of furnishing houses with Chinaware. . . piling the China upon the tops of Cabinetes, scritoires, and every Chymney Piece. . . And here was also her Majesty’s fine collection of Delftware which indeed was very large and fine; and here was also a vast stock of fine Chine ware, the whereof was not to be seen in England. . .”

<sup>46</sup>See, for example, Jean-Nicolas de Parival (1605–1669), *Les delices de la Hollande, contenant une description exacte du país, des moeurs et des coutumes des habitans...* (La Haye: van Dole, 1710), 121: “Cette ville [Delf] fait un grand Commerce de cette Porcelaine de terre qu’on fait dans ses manufactures, qui se débite par toute la Hollande et dans les pais étrangers.” Eventually, even the term “delft,” like the term “china,” came to signal not simply a country of origin but a material that could be appropriated by ceramic producers from other places. See, for example, Archer, *Delftware*, 4, for use of term “delft” to refer to English wares.

<sup>47</sup>Although it may not have been true in practice that women collected more porcelain than men, it was true in the popular imagination. “By the late eighteenth century porcelain had become synonymous with effeminacy, and [as a journalist of 1755 put it] a man’s soft spot for porcelain and chinoiserie smacked suspiciously of a ‘delicate make and silky disposition,’” Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 284.

<sup>48</sup>David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), addresses gender and chinoiserie generally. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, “Women;” Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects, Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Stacey Sloboda, “Porcelain bodies: gender, acquisitiveness, and taste in eighteenth-century England,” in *Material Cultures, 1740–1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, ed. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 19–36, consider gender and porcelain specifically.

who liked it were conflated through popular texts and images as alluring playthings whose physical accessibility was promoted by their appearance in the public marketplace, projecting the culture's ambivalence about consumption onto women. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues, the image of china functions as a marker for female superficiality, or for a potential female depravity located in an inordinate attraction to "things," rather than positioning women as conservative managers of a familial economy.<sup>49</sup> Just as the English "female china lover" is a far cry from the clean and tidy Dutch housewife extolled by earlier English travelers to the Netherlands, expensive tile panels were no longer perceived to carry the material and ethical associations of earlier tiled spaces. The practicality of tile and its ability to resist the dangerous qualities of both moral and physical dirt were now subsumed in concerns with the economy, corrupt feminine tastes, and aristocratic privileges. As the Dutch shifted from being primarily consumers of Chinese porcelain, in the early seventeenth century, to successful exporters of wares that imitated East Asian appearances by the late seventeenth, their role in ceramic culture changed. Their success as exporters to the elites of other European countries ensured that Dutch ceramics were no longer associated only with a homely domesticity. Or rather, domesticity itself was no longer seen as the realm of moral restraint in the European imagination, but came to be associated instead, through the very goods produced by the Dutch, with mass display and overt consumption. In addition, as elite Europeans gained greater access to "authentic" Chinese goods and acquired more familiarity with Chinese material culture generally throughout the eighteenth century, the popularity of tin-glazed earthenware in a "Chinese style" contracted, and after 1750 the Dutch ceramic industry suffered a decline that would extend into the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Kowleski-Wallace, "Women," 15, argues that the female, originally the object of male desire, became over the course of the long eighteenth century, the desiring subject.

<sup>50</sup>As one example of the resurgence in popularity of Chinese porcelains among elite collectors in the eighteenth century, see Oliver Impey, "Collecting Oriental Porcelain in Britain in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Burghley Porcelains: An Exhibition from The Burghley House Collection and Based on the 1688 Inventory and 1960 Devonshire Schedule*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Alexandra Munroe and Naomi Noble Richard (New York: Japan Society, 1986), 36–43. While blue-and-white delftware and many forms of blue-and-white Chinese export ware became increasingly common, inexpensive, and undesirable over the course of the eighteenth century, European elites continued to collect (and even compete for) exquisite East Asian porcelains. These high prestige wares were often embellished with innovative multicolor overglaze enamel, rather than simple underglaze blue, which facilitated special orders for personalized decoration, including family coats of arms and depictions of country houses. See, for example, Nishida Hiroko's entry on the Burghley Bowl in Alexandra Munroe and Naomi Noble Richard, ed., *The Burghley House Collection and Based on the 1688 Inventory and 1960 Devonshire Schedule*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Japan Society, 1986), 102–3, cat. 17. My thanks to this essay's anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

## Inventing Tradition and Bringing Delftware Home Again

When delftware was revived in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, its producers appear to have been self-conscious in the ways that they referenced the historical associations of the material. In an 1886 advertisement placed in a Paris newspaper, for example, the Delft ceramic company De Porceleyne Fles recommended its wares as “beautifully decorated entirely by hand, and copying exactly past forms.”<sup>51</sup> De Porceleyne Fles had been in existence since the seventeenth century, but its renaissance began only in 1876, when Joost Thooft (1844–1890) purchased the factory. Thooft, not unlike other delftware entrepreneurs, was motivated not only by profit but also by the artistic aims of the Arts and Crafts movement. He saw the revival of delftware as a means of saving the craft of pottery as much as resuscitating the ceramics industry. From at least 1877, the company participated in exhibitions and fairs that attempted to position De Porceleyne Fles’ products as art rather than commerce.<sup>52</sup> The artistic heritage—the “past forms” copied “exactly” by De Porceleyne Fles potters—was not to be found in the ceramics of the antique world but rather in the tin-glazed earthenware of seventeenth-century Netherlands. As with seventeenth-century Dutch imitations of Chinese porcelain, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century delftware manufacturers rarely attempted to replicate exactly seventeenth-century examples. Although Thooft began the revival of de Porceleyne Fles by reintroducing original delftware techniques, he soon abandoned this process and, in order to make the original fragile delftware ceramic stronger, developed a white-bodied fine clay, which he fired at high temperatures to produce more durable stoneware. On this white body, blue decorations were applied by hand and covered with a transparent glaze, creating objects that had the strength of English stoneware but the outer appearance of traditional Delft pottery.<sup>53</sup> In the resuscitation of delftware as a national commodity, “feel” mattered more than “rightness,” and it was the recognizable combination of blue-and-white across a ceramic body, regardless of the vessel’s particular shape, decoration, or the material under the glaze, that signaled a “past form.” In addition, as a material that linked the “Golden Age” to the contemporary moment, delftware, in the hands of men like Thooft, was uniquely capable of promoting an image of the Dutch nation. In works such as *Tile Picture of a Painting by Frans Hals* (c. 1900, Fig. 5), Dutch history and Dutch craft are united in a perfect manifestation of Dutch identity.

*Tile Picture of a Painting by Frans Hals* is similar to the tile panels decorating ocean liners that made routine voyages between Holland and the United States in the

<sup>51</sup>“Faïnce artistique veritable Delft, décor bieu entièrement fait à la main, copie exacte des forms anciennes chaque object porte la marque authentique: Delft.” Advertisement reproduced in Rick Erickson, *Royal Delft: A Guide to De Porceleyne Fles* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2003), 37.

<sup>52</sup>For more on nationalism, the revival of the delftware industry and exhibitions, see van Jan-Daan van Dam, “Van een verwaarloosd naar een nationaal product: het verzamelen van Delftse faïence,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 49, no. 1 (2001): 72–83.

<sup>53</sup>van Lemmen, *Delftware*, 167.



**Fig. 5** Joost Thoof & Labouchere, *Tile Picture of a Painting by Frans Hals*, c. 1900. Dutch glazed tiles in a wood frame. Yonkers, Hudson River Museum, gift of Mrs. Arthur W. Little. Photo: John Maggiotto

nineteenth century and facilitated American tourism of the “Old World.”<sup>54</sup> The location on transatlantic ships of ornate interior decorations in the vein of *Tile Picture* points to the primary audience for De Porcelyne Fles’ products.<sup>55</sup> For

<sup>54</sup>Panetta, *Dutch*, 267.

<sup>55</sup>For more on American tourism in the Netherlands, see Laura Vookles, “Return in Glory: The Holland Society Visits ‘The Fatherland’,” in *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture*, ed. by Roger Panetta (Yonkers: Fordham University Press, 2009), 257–97.

although judges at the fairs where De Porceleyne Fles showed its work were occasionally offended by the facile reproduction of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings on plates and tiles, Thooft understood that it was precisely this combination of image and material that would appeal to American tourists to the Netherlands, especially those who held specific ideas of how history, ceramic, and painting were united in an idealized view of Dutch material culture.<sup>56</sup> In *Holland and Its People*, Edmondo de Amicis (1846–1908), an Italian author of novels and travel books, recounted his experiences traveling through the Netherlands. His book became a bestseller in the United States and helped to articulate a New World idealization of Dutch domestic life:

Everywhere there was a profusion of porcelain vases, of cups, lamps, mirrors, small pictures, bureaus, cupboards, knickknacks, and small objects of every shape and for every use. All were marvelously clean, and bespoke the thousand little wants that the love of a sedentary life creates—the careful foresight, the continual care, the taste for the little things, the love of order, the economy of space; in short, it was the abode of a quiet domestic woman.<sup>57</sup>

De Amicis' emphasis on things, beginning with a ceramic vase, as the most overt manifestation of a "the abode of a quiet domestic woman" returns the reader to a pre-eighteenth century vision of domesticity, when materials such as porcelain were understood not as dangerous commodities but rather as emblems of virtue. Earlier in his text, de Amicis is overt in his praise of delftware:

Moreover, there followed the decline and almost the extinction of that industry which once was the glory and riches of the city, the manufacture of Delft ware. In this art at first the Dutch artisans imitated the shapes and designs of Chinese and Japanese china, and finally succeeded in doing admirable work by uniting the Dutch and Asiatic styles. Dutch pottery became famous throughout Northern Europe and it is now-a-days as much sought after by lovers of this art as the best Italian products.<sup>58</sup>

In this excerpt, de Amicis makes clear that in the popular imagination of nineteenth-century consumers, Dutch tin-glazed earthenware owed a debt to their East Asian models, even as they become vehicles, in works similar to *Tile Picture of a Painting by Frans Hals*, for representations of specifically Dutch content. Like the Rijksmuseum *Tile Panel with Chinese Ornament and Africans*, the *Tile Picture of a Painting by Frans Hals* is not meant to be viewed primarily as a painting. In other words, an oil painting copy of an oil painting by Frans Hals would not have the same

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<sup>56</sup>Not only delftware but also Dutch craft in general was understood by viewers from the United States to reflect "the delights of peaceful domestic life" well into the 1930s. In a 1936 publication of the *Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*, for example, the newly installed "Dutch room" of 1608 was described in these terms: "Its task was the adornment not of the palace, but the house of a simple citizen, raised for the first time to a plane of economic security and solid industrious well-being. His household possessions—the work of skilled local craftsmen—reflected the delights of peaceful domestic life," quoted in Ella Schaap, *Delft Ceramics at the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2003), 3.

<sup>57</sup>Edmondo de Amicis, *Holland and Its People*, vol. 1, trans. from the 13<sup>th</sup> edition by Helen Zimmern (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1884), 159.

<sup>58</sup>de Amicis, *Holland and Its People*, 136.



resonance as a painting on tile of an oil painting by Frans Hals. The work's meaning depends upon our ability to see the panel as *both* material and image—and to find the place where these two concepts meet in a celebration of national history.

In ways that go beyond the scope of this essay, American nineteenth-century conceptions of home, family, and femininity differed markedly from Dutch seventeenth-century or English eighteenth-century ideas of domesticity. The nineteenth-century popularity of delftware in the United States was inspired in part by Americans' desire to imitate what they understood as seventeenth-century Dutch domestic lives, or at least the material aspects of those lives. The American aim to decorate in the "Dutch style" was part of a larger effort, as Annette Stott has argued, to identify with the seventeenth-century Dutch who colonized North America and to give American history material form.<sup>59</sup> Amassing a collection of delftware was one vehicle for inventing a cultural tradition that would legitimize the New World (not simply the New World as a whole but a particular class of "old" elites who aimed to shore-up their status against the rise of the newly wealthy and the influx of Eastern European and Chinese immigrants) through an evocation of the Old. This aim was carried out largely through the buying habits and decorating tastes of nineteenth-century women who saw delftware as an heirloom from America's adopted past.

In satisfying the American taste for Dutch blue-and-white wares, men like Thooft benefited from the model of earlier Dutch delftware producers. Building upon the historical associations of blue-and-white tin-glazed earthenware as a specifically "Dutch" material, and continuing to treat the delftware surface as an ideal location for imagery drawn from diverse media, Thooft and his colleagues repositioned delftware as an evocative representation of Dutch history, Dutch domesticity, and Dutch craft—in other words, a material that was ripe for the consumption of New World enthusiasts.

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<sup>59</sup>Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art and Culture* (Woodstock: Overlook Books, 1998), 198.

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