

DUTCH SEVENTEENTH CENTURY “HIGH-LIFE” GENRE PAINTINGS: THE
MOTIF OF PORCELAIN AND ITS DIVERGING THEMES

by

Adriana E. Baker
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_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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Adriana E. Baker
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2017

Director: Angela Ho, Professor
Department of Art History

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents Elizabeth and Robert, and my partner Frank, who continue to support and inspire me every day.

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ABSTRACT

DUTCH SEVENTEENTH CENTURY “HIGH-LIFE” GENRE PAINTINGS: THE MOTIF OF PORCELAIN AND ITS DIVERGING THEMES

Adriana E. Baker, M.A.

George Mason University, 2020

Director: Dr. Angela Ho

This thesis explores the motif of porcelain in seventeenth century Dutch “high-life” genre paintings. “High-life” genre paintings depict imagery inspired by the everyday lives of the upper echelons of Dutch society. My focus is on the periods between 1648 to 1700 when a notable shift in genre paintings occurred. I will follow recent art historical research that contends “high-life” genre images created multiple layers of associations for their contemporary audiences. In particular, I am interested in the significance of the inclusion of porcelain in “high-life” genre paintings as one of the components that create intricate layers of meaning. It is notable that porcelain was a product made for domestic use, as were the paintings that feature them. Yet porcelain as a commodity carries associations of global trade and is thus tied to the public world of commerce. I will argue that the inclusion of porcelain in “high-life” genre paintings creates associations to Dutch national pride in their trade, and their worldly knowledge of the “exotic,” while adding to the visual language of domesticity.

INTRODUCTION

In an age fraught with warfare, colonial expansion, and technological advances the Dutch Republic built a global enterprise in the seventeenth century. They became an important European power on the world stage through their economic expansion in the global trade network. The social and cultural transformation brought about by rapid expansion helped to define the Dutch identity in this period. Notably, there was not a fixed set of characteristics that represented Dutch identity but a portrayal that included a plethora of associations that could be reinterpreted and idealized for political, commercial, and societal ends.¹ These transformations and manipulations can be seen in their art. This thesis will examine “high-life” genre paintings from 1648 to 1700 in this context.

Dutch seventeenth-century genre paintings present imagery inspired by everyday life. The quantity in which these types of paintings were produced throughout the period speaks to their important connection to understanding culture at this time. Although audiences looking back upon seventeenth-century genre paintings have noted the impressive naturalistic appearance of these paintings it is important to remember that

¹ David Onnekink and Gijs Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World: a History of a Global Power* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 48.

these are works of artifice cleverly composed by artists. It was common for artists to appeal to the Dutch art market due to the fact that painters did not exclusively work on commissions.² While Dutch genre painting offers a variety of subject matter, artists limited their subjects to selective views of society, choosing to illustrate scenes that would appeal to their art market. They often painted for a market of anonymous buyers, and therefore needed to produce works that appealed broadly to consumers' tastes.³

There was a noticeable shift in the art market resulting from economic expansions that followed the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The shift produced a wider distribution of wealth within the classes of Dutch society and an increased expenditure on luxury goods.⁴ The category of "high-life" genre paintings emerged in these changing conditions. "High-life" genre painting became a new painting specialty where scenes of Upper-class society and the interior of their homes were idealized. This was one of the most popular subjects among wealthy consumers. Gerard ter Borch's *Curiosity*, c.1660-62 (Figure 1), is an example of "high-life" genre painting. Paintings such as this established a new level of refinement by limiting the number of figures and showing a marked attention to details including clothing and interior spaces that reflected contemporary fashions.⁵ Here three women in a lavish interior are centered around a small table covered in rich material. The woman in the center is seated; the woman to the

² Wayne E. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 96-97.

³ Angela K. Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting: Repetition and Invention* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 44-46.

⁴ Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 96-97.

⁵ Helmer J. Helmers, and Geert H. Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), 276-277.

right peers over her shoulder, a third woman stands to the left of the table. They are employed writing a letter, a signifier of their upper class status. A small dog is perched on a velvet-covered stool. The lavish interior reflects wealth and aesthetics from this period by including a velvet chair placed next to a white mantel that features columns, a painting, a brass chandelier and gilding. The background is in shadow; the standing woman wears an opulent silk dress. Light plays on the folds of the silk garment and originates in front of the elegant figures. Painters like Ter Borch introduced new types of subject matter, compositional formats, and motifs, which increasingly depicted scenes of domesticity.

In past publications, art historians have understood “high-life” genre paintings to demonstrate the ideal domestic setting for private home life.⁶ Debates on its iconography, moral lessons, and “apparent realism” have ensued in past research and commentary.⁷ I will examine a different way that objects can communicate meanings in these paintings by arguing that the inclusion of porcelain within “high-life” genre paintings becomes part of the visual language of domesticity. Genre paintings are not limited to sending moralizing messages, nor are they realistic portrayals of life; they are constructed images that play a part in creating the culture of the period. Porcelain’s inclusion also references

⁶ See Eddy De Jongh, “Realism and Seeming Realism in Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting” in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* edited by Wayne E. Franits (Cambridge University Press, 1997). Eddy de Jongh and M. Hoyle, *Questions of Meaning: Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Leiden: Primavera, 2000). Wayne E. Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁷ De Jongh, “Realism and Seeming Realism.”

the worldliness of Dutch culture, the importance of world trade to its economy, and an interest in the exotic.

While I think that it is true that many genre paintings convey moralizing messages about gendered behavior, I feel, by focusing solely on these themes, we risk overlooking other meanings that the depicted objects may convey. In this thesis, I focus on porcelain, which offers an opportunity for exploring the significance of powerful trade networks in Dutch life and art. I will use a multidisciplinary approach to examine porcelain's presence in genre paintings, drawing on theories about the "apparent realism" in paintings, social and economic history, consumption, and the "exotic". The following chapters will explore how these paintings functioned as cultural objects that helped to create and aid the upper classes definition of Dutch identity, the dialogues on civility, and their views on the outside world.

The first chapter examines the innovations behind the shifts in genre painting and representations of patrician life that occurred in the middle and late seventeenth century. During this period the Dutch urban economy flourished, creating new consumers of varying backgrounds. Past theories suggest that during this time of growing prosperity, codes of civility developed among the Dutch elite.⁸ Scholars argue that these codes of civility were created through upper class refinement of social attitude standards as they gradually subscribed to evolving codes of manners, gestures, dress, and more. These evolving codes were then reflected in the art of the time, especially genre paintings.⁹ As

⁸ Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 96-97.

⁹ Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 96-97.

elite taste and standards changed, the so-called “low life” genre scenes shifted towards “high-life” genre paintings in their stead.¹⁰

While I do agree with some of these points, I find this argument incomplete, because they seem to bypass the pictorial mode of genre paintings. “High-life” genre paintings are more than just reflections of the standards of behavior of the elite classes, they are works of artifice and therefore do not depict the reality of daily life. They provide an imagined visual culture for the elite classes to emulate and participate in the creation of their identity. I am not saying that this ‘reality effect’ creates hidden meanings to be found; instead they offer a perceptual mode of knowledge of the world, a concept first suggested by Svetlana Alpers.¹¹ Her methodology is one I will explore in this work.

The second chapter will examine theories on consumption and the exotic in the Dutch Republic by researching the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company or VOC), trade with China. Trade rivalries among European countries are an important factor when considering how Western cultures defined their society, identity, and power over the “exotic” Asian world. I will consider how European travelers linked “Chineseness” to their own comprehension of Chinese material culture. Dutch burghers or aristocrats who owned “high-life” genre paintings would have understood the inclusion of porcelain as a direct reference to the VOC’s trade with China.

¹⁰ “Low-life” genre painting was popular during the early 17th century. The subject matter used in this type of painting portrayed the lowest echelons of society in an ‘unvarnished’ satirical manner. See Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 25-37.

¹¹ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xxiv.

Both the paintings and luxury import goods symbolized the owner's worldliness and his ideas about the exotic. "Exotic" in this context refers to the various forms of Western contact and their perceptions of non-European places, peoples, and artifacts defining them as "other." Paintings would have been displayed in the homes of the elite alongside luxury goods and natural wonders.¹² Artists had to consider how this might affect the reception of their work. Dutch painting may have been a way for contemporary audiences to display a perceptual view of knowledge of the world around them as well as present their elite identity in the company of peers. By including porcelain in their paintings artists are creating associations and juxtapositions with the very objects and topics that elite people may have discussed. However, "high-life" genre paintings mainly show scenes of what would be considered the domestic realm. The third chapter will examine the interesting relationship of porcelain as a reference to both worldliness and domesticity, which were gendered concepts in Dutch moral tracts.

It has been argued that "high-life" genre paintings of the home conceptualize the realm of domesticity as something that is set apart from the public outside world. However, as Elizabeth Honig and other scholars have pointed out, in reality things were not that simple. The lines between private home life and the public were blurred, often intermixing more than the paintings suggest.¹³ Artist's images both shaped and were affected by these social borders. I argue that the inclusion of porcelain is a good example

¹² Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 51.

¹³ Elizabeth Alice Honig, "The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting" in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, edited by Wayne E. Franits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 188-189.

of how the links to the private and public life, and the gendered constructs of those idealized categories are often blurred, even in the images themselves.

This study explores the use of porcelain in “high-life” genre paintings from 1648-1700. I contend that the inclusion of porcelain by Dutch artists connects this luxury object to Dutch identity and their dialogues on civility to the idea of worldliness and the exotic, while adding to the visual language of domesticity. Porcelain’s inclusion blurs the lines between the outside world and the works of artifice resulting in dialogues addressing these tensions. My investigation centers on new questions about how these “high-life” genre paintings would have been constructed, bought, and consumed by contemporary audience.

CHAPTER ONE

Developments in Dutch Genre Paintings and Art Historical Interpretations

The Dutch Republic was a rising power during the seventeenth century. Their growing power resulted from an ascendant economy supported by their expanding trade networks. Due to the struggle for independence against the occupying Spanish forces there was an influx of immigrants from the Southern Netherlands when the southern province was conquered again by Spain. A large number of merchants, artisans and intellectuals who moved from the southern provinces provided general business expertise in trade and helped to sustain much of their trade.¹⁴ As the Dutch expanded their maritime endeavors they had to compete on an international scale against the dominant trading empires of Portugal and Spain. In order to contend with these powerful European traders on March 20, 1602 the States General in The Hague adopted a charter merging several companies into a single large national company, known as the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (the Dutch East India Company or VOC). This addressed a

¹⁴ To read more about the various outlets of the Dutch trade markets read Julie Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven Conn. Yale University Press, 2007).

number of the Republic's concerns about gaining access to the Asian trade routes.¹⁵ This coupled with the development of their banking systems and stock exchange allowed merchants more access to capital for funding expeditions to Asia. The establishment of the VOC helped the economy flourish even more throughout the 17th century. Most fundamental was the monopoly of rich trades in spices, sugar, silks, dyestuffs, and more.

This booming economic atmosphere cultivated the purchasing power of broad segments of Dutch society. This thesis will focus on the period after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which effectively resolved the long-standing war of independence against Spain.¹⁶ During this time the sudden death of the Stadholder, William II, in 1651 heralded in a new stadholderless era under the leadership of John de Witt as Pensionary.¹⁷ This created more stability for the Dutch Republic. Fighting had ensued within the Republic between those who supported William II, the House of Orange and those that

¹⁵ Chapter 2 will contemplate the VOC and their trade history with China.

¹⁶ From 1481 until 1579 the Hapsburg King of Spain ruled the 17 provinces of the Netherlands. In 1579 the provinces joined together and rebelled against the Catholic Hapsburg rule and declared their independence resulting in The 80 Years War. It was in 1588 that the 7 Northern provinces declared themselves the Dutch Republic and by 1609 The 80 Years War ended with the Twelve Years Truce. In 1621 the truce ended and war with Spain resumed. In 1648 the Peace of Westphalia brought about the end of the Thirty Years War and the Dutch Republic officially became formally recognized. To read more about the history of the various wars with Spain read Onnekink and Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World*.

¹⁷ The two main offices of the Republic's governing body were the States General, the national governing body, and the Stadholder, formally the provincial governor and a leading figure. The States General was comprised of representatives (regents) from the 7 provinces and was responsible for federal policy, foreign policy, military affairs and their financing, supervision of commercial companies and administration of Generality Lands. The Stadholder, a position usually held by the Princes of Orange or their cousins, was the chief commander of the army (captain general), navy (admiral general), the chairman of the Council of State, and mediator of disputes between the provinces. Read more in Onnekink and Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World*, 5-10.

supported the regents, the States Party. William II fought against the regents' military cut backs by raising an army and arresting six of Holland's principal regents in an attempt to gain more political control. His early death ended the conflict because his son was too young to take the position as the next Stadholder. De Witt was not part of the House of Orange therefore he became Pensionary, an advisor to Holland's regents, ending much of the internal conflict for a period of time. The stability that followed cultivated more economic changes, sustained by the continued expansion in maritime trade. Art historians have long debated how societal fluctuations during this time affected contemporary artist's portrayals. The following summary of the art historical debate lays the groundwork for this thesis.

Art Historical Debate on the Character of Dutch Genre Paintings

The history and reception of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting is linked to the ongoing debate about its purpose and character. As early as the 1550's and following late into the nineteenth century, scholars who reviewed Netherlandish art subscribed to the notion that Dutch artists imitated nature to form a realistic view of life around them. In the twentieth century, more debates ensued as art historians no longer made the assumption that these paintings simply depicted reality. By the 1940's many art historians began applying the iconographical method of interpretation to Dutch genre paintings. Erwin Panofsky's influential work in iconography used his iconographic method to interpret Rembrandt van Rijn's painting *Danae* in order to show that the painting reconstructed the myth through hidden symbols and messages. Since the 1960s,

through the leadership of art historian Eddy de Jongh, iconology has been the dominant method used to interpret Dutch art, especially genre paintings.

De Jongh's ground breaking essay "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw, (Realism and Seeming Realism in Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting)" published in 1971, argued that Dutch artists created a "seeming realism" that included hidden symbols and messages that viewers had to "read" to appreciate a painting's expanded significance.¹⁸ In order to clarify this argument he coined the term "realisme-schijnrealisme" (realism-surface realism) to help designate a separation between the realistic form of painting and the content of the symbols.

According to De Jongh,

In numerous paintings objects are used to represent both what they are and something else. They indicate something beyond the picture itself. This phenomenon never affects the depiction as a whole, but, at most, certain specific details; however, objects which are not encoded and simply represent what they depict, also appear.¹⁹

He argues that in order to decipher these hidden meanings and messages, art historians must look to emblem books and other printed works from the 17th century. A mainstay of this era, emblem books included pictures and text to educate the populace on appropriate behaviors and practices in keeping with a high moral standard. Iconographers also used conduct books such as Jacob Cats' *Houwelyck* (Marriage) first published in 1625 to help them decipher images. This book was a comprehensive treatise on marriage and family

¹⁸ De Jongh, "Realism and Seeming Realism," 21-23.

¹⁹ Quoted in Michael North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1997), 7-8.

life for women. In his book Cats states that young women must be “chaste, diligent, silent, and obedient” remaining in the home to work on their domestic skills and trusting God to guide them to suitable spouses.²⁰ Cats discusses skills such as needlework as paramount for women to display that they are virtuous, well-trained young women. De Jongh and other art historians reference sources such as Cats’ book when analyzing images. For example they argue that the action or presence of needlework symbolizes docility, domesticity, diligence, good training, virtue etc. based on these types of sources.

De Jongh also looks to Samuel van Hoogstraten’s 1678 *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst; anders de zichthaere werelt* (*Introduction to the Academy of Painting; or the Visible World*) in order to support his argument that hidden meanings are veiled within images from this time. Van Hoogstraten was a Dutch painter, poet and author who lived from 1627-1678. His art treatises are some of the few sources available to art historians looking to see what Dutch contemporaries wrote about art theory. De Jongh is able to bring in a contemporary artist’s perspective connecting his evidence with contemporary authors, who published the emblem books by employing the following quote from Van Hoogstraten’s treatise,

Although the art of painting is great in and of itself, Pliny says, none the less, the profound discoveries and secret reasons that can sometimes be found are its particular glory; certainly here the profound intelligence of the master manifests itself... it is thus...the splendor of the paintings, that are cloaked in one or another instructive significance.²¹

²⁰ Quoted in Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 10.

²¹ De Jongh, “Realism and Seeming Realism,” 23.

The Suitor's Visit, c.1658 by Gerard Ter Borch (Figure 2), is one of the paintings De Jongh's followers have analyzed at length. The painting includes four figures and a dog. The viewer's eye is drawn to the woman wearing the silk skirt and salmon-pink top. She attracts the viewer's eye as a result of her reflective skirt and upright posture. The viewer follows her gaze to the bowing man, who has just entered the room. He appears to bow as he enters, evident by his pointed right foot and the slight dip of his head. Next the viewer notices the other figures, whose actions seem to comment on the relationship of the two main figures. On the right side of the painting is a woman in blue playing a lute seated at a table covered with an oriental rug. The woman with the lute is looking at sheet music on the table as she plays her instrument. The rest of the room is kept in shadow so as not to distract the viewer's attention from the two main figures. Those following De Jongh's school of thought have contended that the dog within the image is either a symbol of fidelity or it is sniffing which would be an allusion to the latent eroticism of the scene. It has been noted that the lute player either symbolizes the harmony of souls or sensory pleasures. Therefore, this could either be a scene of courtship or one of a sexual liaison; the most commonly accepted iconographic reading of this painting is that of a courtship scene.²²

Later art historians question whether the insertion of hidden symbols was a primary objective of the artist and their viewers. One of the main areas of discussion is the fact that emblem books are a very distinct type of literature with traditions and

²² David R. Smith, "Irony and Civility: Notes on the Convergence of Genre and Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987): 423.

purposes that differ entirely from paintings. The restraint present in images like *The Suitor's Visit* creates an indeterminacy regarding the actions or thoughts of the depicted figures. A single-minded focus on iconography and moral messages embedded in artworks disregards artistic conventions such as the way fabrics are rendered and compositions are chosen. Other types of social signifiers or interpretations of the objects included in these types of scenes may speak beyond moralizing messages.

Art historians such as Eric Jan Sluiter also pointed to the problematic choice of the term “realism-surface realism” due to the fact that works at this time were created in a studio and did not mirror reality in the same way a photograph exactly records what the viewer is seeing. Sluiter has also pointed out that the previously cited passage by Van Hoogstraten is directing painters on how to address single figure scenes and history paintings. Moreover, the passage does not explain or address genre paintings and it is only meant to help artists formulate a depiction that facilitates the viewer’s comprehension.²³

Svetlana Alpers argues against The Utrecht School of De Jongh in her controversial book *The Art of Describing*, published in 1983. She argues that the iconographic method is deeply rooted in the traditional study of Italian art and its narrative quality. The institutionalization of art historical practice with its central focus on Italy does not provide adequate opportunity to analyze artworks produced outside this

²³ Eric J. Sluiter, “Didactic and Disguised Meanings? Several Seventeenth-Century texts on painting and the Iconological approach to Dutch painting of this period” in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* edited by Wayne E. Franits (Cambridge University Press 1997), 84.

tradition.²⁴ Alpers' method falls outside the Italian tradition, not because she is challenging the historical approach to Italian Renaissance art but because she believes the discussion of Dutch art should be analyzed based on parameters unique to its own traditions. The new theory that derived from her groundbreaking assertion is "that central aspects of seventeenth-century Dutch art- and indeed of the northern tradition of which it is part- can be best understood as being an art of describing as distinguished from the narrative art of Italy."²⁵ Alpers argues that "the art of describing" is directly linked to the early techniques of scientific observation found during this period in conjunction with the popular devices of the time such as mapping, the camera obscura, and lenses. She also points out that many of the theories utilized during the age of observation are rooted in the writings of Constantijn Huygens, Johannes Kepler, Francis Bacon, and others. She later clarifies this theory by stating,

If we take the pictorial mode-the reality effect- not as hiding moral instruction, but as offering a perceptual module of knowledge of the world, then pictures are related to the empirical interests of this age of observation. The picture takes its place beside the many other devices- the eye, the microscopic lens- which squeeze and press nature so that we can experience (or experiment, in the seventeenth century use of the word) her. The attentive eye and crafty hand of the painter are here related to the eye and hand of the experimenter.²⁶

Here Alpers is arguing that a painting, like these scientific tools, is a device that helps us see the world. She also references one of Van Hoogstraten's chapters wherein he

²⁴ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, xix-xx.

²⁵ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, xx.

²⁶ Svetlana Alpers, "Picturing Dutch Culture" in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* edited by Wayne E. Franits (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

addresses the aim of the art of painting. She uses his assertion that “painting is a science for representing all ideas or notions which the whole of visible nature is able to produce and for deceiving the eye with drawing and color,” in order to support her theory.²⁷

Alpers received mixed reviews on her book due to the fact that she challenged traditional art historical norms and her writing, at times, was confusing to the reader. Many of her critics argued that her theory contended that Dutch art was simply descriptive in much the same way that past scholars argued that Dutch art simply mirrored the reality in which they lived.²⁸ The other objection to her work was the distinction that she drew between description and narration, between northern and southern art. It seems that many critics misinterpreted Alpers’ intention. While I also feel there are sections of her book that were difficult to follow, she is not arguing that Dutch art was a true depiction of the literal reality. Rather she is arguing that Dutch artists were using the same tools and modes of observation as the scientists during this period allowing artists to represent familiar ideas or notions, and thereby to make sense of the world around them. Artists were told to store visual memory in the same way that a camera lens captures a moment in time. The Dutch artist was the vehicle “mirroring” the world their viewers would then observe. Therefore, the audience needs to look at Dutch painting in the context of the age of observation. Dutch artists’ apparent realism in their depiction of people, places and things is an example of the successful mastery of their craft. Motifs and symbols are not hidden in these works of artifice but are clearly displayed through lifelike images painted as a result of close observation.

²⁷ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 77.

²⁸ Alpers, “Picturing Dutch Culture,” 60.

I am in agreement with Alpers that these symbols are not hidden. Instead they offer a perceptual mode of knowledge of the world that has been shaped and created by both artist and consumer. The “high-life” genre paintings provide an imagined reality that the wealthy elite could use to convey and develop their own identities. The ongoing debate between these two methods has unfortunately created very distinct divisions between art historians working on their own research. The problem that limits art historian’s comprehension on the Dutch artists’ objectives as well as the reception of works by their audience is the dearth of contemporary literature on the matter. Due to this problem, I believe a multidisciplinary approach must be taken when studying Dutch art. While I find myself more in agreement with Alpers’ point of view, that there is an Italian bias that can still be found in much of the past work, I think art historians are starting to distance themselves from these biases. It should be said that iconological research has given this field of study many valuable insights, however, it is still flawed.

I do not think hidden messages and symbols were the driving force behind Dutch artists’ creative processes. It seems odd to think that contemporary audiences would have to play the role of detective with every painting they purchased. It should be noted that although the Dutch Republic had a vast art market, the range of subjects that artists depicted was rather limited. Contemporary artists, many of whom only specialized in one genre, would have followed a set formula that responded to not only pictorial traditions but also aesthetic preferences and market demands. While Van Hoogstraten’s treatise is one of the few sources of contemporary literature on the nature of painting from this era, art historians frequently over-utilized it by focusing solely on one source without seeking

further contemporary Dutch sources to round out their discussion. As Sluijter has noted on several occasions, the section of this treatise most often used to justify the concept of hidden meanings in paintings was specifically directed to address history paintings. He points out that when Van Hoogstraten is discussing “accessories” in a painting he is clarifying that the representation must be clear in order for viewers to understand the image.²⁹

One of the few substantial texts about theories in Dutch painting that art historians can reference is Philips Angel’s speech *Lof der schilder-konst (In Praise of Painting)* published in 1642. Angle was an artist and writer that lived from 1618-1664 in the Dutch Republic. Scholars have underutilized this text in the past; however, more recent studies have brought it back to the attention of those working in the field. Angel begins his speech by recounting a history of painting and why, in his opinion, it will always be superior to other artistic expression most notably, sculpture and poetry. For his case against sculpture he states:

We say that the art of painting is far more general because it is capable of imitating nature much more copiously, for in addition to depicting every kind of creature...it can render every kind of metal and can distinguish between them...It can be used to depict a rainbow, rain, thunder, lightning, clouds, vapor, light, reflections and more of such things, like the rising of the sun, early morning, the decline of the sun, evening, the moon illuminating the night, with her attendant companions, the stars, reflections in the water, human hair, horses foaming at the mouth and so forth, none of which the sculptures can imitate.³⁰

²⁹ Sluijter, “Didactic and Disguised Meanings,” 84.

³⁰ Angel Philips, Michael Hoyle, and Hessel Miedema, “Praise of Painting,” in *Simiolus* 24.2/3 (1996): 239.

The passage shows that Angel praises the close observation of nature needed in order to render paintings as “realistically” as possible making the objects within appear almost real. At no point does he mention the artist’s need to veil an object’s true intention when creating a composition. Furthermore, when comparing painting to poetry and why the painter’s profession is superior he states:

For (many scholars say), a painting is silent and poetry a speaking painting. I readily admit that this is so, but not that they therefore deserve the greatest praise and honor because it is brought speaking onto the stage, which is worth nothing if a work is not read attentively, distinguishing between what must be read as moving, powerful, charming or manly, which grace depends upon what the reader makes of it. This is not so with painting, for our sight distinguishes the impulses immediately our eye falls upon a painting in the form that the painter wished it to be displayed, for it is not bound to the user’s will. So in this respect painting excels poetry.³¹

In Angel’s painting-poetry comparison he illustrates that one of poetry’s shortcomings is the possibility of misinterpretation whereas the eye of the viewer immediately recognizes subject matter that the painter wishes to convey. In reviewing these two passages from Angel’s speech it should be evident that symbolism and messages are not hidden within Dutch art. As Angel has stated a painting’s strength is that upon its viewing contemporaries should immediately understand the artist’s goal due to his precise imitation of life.

This does not mean that motifs and symbolism do not exist in Dutch painting but it does mean that these symbols and motifs would have been easily recognizable for

³¹ Philips, Hoyle, and Miedema, “Praise of Painting,” 239-240.

contemporary viewers. As Angel transitions to discuss qualities painters need to become masters, he claims it is necessary to have the ability to successfully combine elements for the viewer:

Thirdly, the painter must have a talent for combining things in a fluent and natural way. The truth of this can be seen from the following, namely that one who is fluent in composition will never experience difficulty with a complicated arrangement of objects, since his fertile spirit spills forth thousands of alternative inventions when he puts forth all of his thoughts and allows them to play around together. And if this fluency is accompanied by naturalness, and they go together as sisters, one will find that this imparts such a pleasantly attractive luster to art that this will be more readily grasped by wise masters than from a long explanation on my part so this is also required of a painter, because it enables him to make the histories he represents more comprehensible to the lovers of art and to those who see them.³²

Ideas similar to Angel's can be found in Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Inleyding*, where he describes the purpose of painting:

Painting is a science for depicting all ideas, or mental images, that the entire visible world can provide: and deceiving the eye with outline and color...for a perfect Painting is like a mirror of Nature, making things that are not appear to be, and deceiving in a permissible, diverting and commendable way.³³

Van Hoogstraten's definition of painting provides further evidence that Dutch artists understood a painting's purpose, as, to use Alpers' phrase 'a perceptual view of knowledge' encompassing the entire visible world around them.

³² Philips, Hoyle, and Miedema, "Praise of Painting," 243.

³³ Quoted in both Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 86 and Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 77.

When viewing a painting such as Pieter de Hooch's *Man Handing a Letter to a Woman in the Entrance Hall of a House*, c.1670 (Figure 3), we can see how a prominent contemporary artist utilized his understanding of the world around him to create complex compositions. This image includes three figures and two dogs. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to a woman seated on a *vlondertje* (wooden platform that protects from cold drafts on the floor). The light shining from an open window illuminates the woman's hands and the small dog in her lap. This draws the viewer's attention to the open letter she is holding. The viewer's eye then follows the woman's gaze as she addresses the man walking through the door. As the viewer's eye moves across the background of the painting one notices that there is a black dog at the front left center, standing on a black and white tile floor. The dog leads the eye to an open arch door on the back wall. This open arch looks out to a canal with homes and people in the distance. It is then that the viewer is made aware of a child in expensive clothing holding a toy just outside the doorframe.

Using Angel's speech as a reference, this painting includes complex compositional elements. As the viewer's eye moves throughout the painting there are several transitional spaces. The woman and the messenger are placed in the *voorhuis* (entrance hall); the messenger has clearly stepped through another door into the space. The eye moves to the black dog, which draws attention to the open arch door where the child stands outside in another transitional space. Additionally the viewer's eyes are drawn across the canal where other homes are present and figures walk on the streets. I would argue that these compositional transitions and the play of space that De Hooch has

rendered in this painting adheres to the quality that Angle praises about the need to be fluent in complicated arrangement of objects and compositions. De Hooch has successfully rendered a seemingly realistic space for each figure to occupy. This speaks to what Van Hoogstraten's definition of a painting references, De Hooch has been able to combine mental images from his lived experiences in order to devise an enticing composition for the viewer's participation.

Art historians have interpreted this painting in the following way: the nature of the painting's setting located in the entrance hall, alludes to an area in the home that is neither completely public nor completely private. The act of the woman holding an open letter and receiving another may allude to a romantic connection, the small dog curled in her lap is often associated with flirtation.³⁴ The act of the larger dog wandering outside but looking back at the messenger alludes to the world beyond the doorway where the letter originated. It has also been noted that the motif of the open door suggests the sexual availability of the woman.³⁵ I would like to reference Angel's speech following this interpretation. It can be argued that contemporary viewers would be able to easily identify these motifs and their relationship to one another. As Angel has pointed out it is the artist's job to render nature as realistically as possible in order to clearly display his intentions to the viewer. Echoing both Angel's and Van Hoogstraten's contentions about painting De Hooch has successfully illuminated societal inferences made visible in his painting. As described by the theorists mentioned, artists strove to delight and deceive the

³⁴ Martha Hollander, "Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter De Hooch" in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 51 (2000): 283-285.

³⁵ Hollander, "Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter De Hooch," 285.

eyes of their viewers. It was through their clever constructions that both artists and buyers helped to define elite society. They specifically placed subjects, objects, and themes together to present the audience with scenes that encompassed the values and ideals the elite used to identify themselves. These principles were understood and displayed through the artist's eye following their observations of the real and natural world.

Following the concept that paintings were supposed to encompass the values and ideals that buyers would use to exemplify their identity, I would like to suggest another possible reading of De Hooch's *Man Handing a Letter to a Woman in the Entrance Hall of a House*. It is clear that images such as this are works of artifice, until recently little attention has been given to the reliability of the architectural structure presented in genre paintings from this time. Due to the topography of Dutch cities, homes located on and around canals were narrow and deep. The way that De Hooch has painted the entrance hall gives the composition more space than would have been readily available even in affluent homes. Inventories and other documents from this period suggest that marble flooring was rarely present in the residences of upper-class homes.³⁶ Wood flooring was most often used due to the fact that it retained heat. De Hooch would have taken these artistic liberties in order to appeal to his potential consumers. Art historians who focus solely on moralizing messages overlook the conscious depiction of artistic conventions.

³⁶ To read more about the documentary evidence see C. Willemijn Fock, "Semblance or Reality? The Domestic Interior in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting" in Mariët Westermann, H. Perry Chapman, C. Willemijn Fock and Eric J. Sluijter, *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt* (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders Publishers, 2001), 83-101.

The contemporary audience would have known that typical Dutch homes did not look this way. Therefore, I suggest that these decisions by the artist may have spoken to the aspirations of wealthy burghers who wanted to identify themselves as affluent to their peers. It is these types of associations that many past art historians have ignored by only employing the iconographic approach. It is important to remember that as contemporary literature contended, a painting's purpose is to visualize the thoughts and attitudes of the era in order to make them recognizable for the public arena where they would be purchased. Because the nature of "high-life" genre painting is not a narrative, the buyer would make specific connections to the scenes in terms of their own intellectual, social and religious background and aspirations.

Upper Class Identity and Culture as seen in and through Genre Painting

Throughout the 17th century, economic shifts affected the way in which the Dutch defined society and their own identities. The concept of "identity" is culturally and historically conditioned. Identity is created through a person's relation to categories and values held by their peers. These categories and values include family groups, religions, professions, and political groups. In other words, a person's identity, which is socially and culturally constructed, gives meaning and value to the definition of the self within the structures of society.³⁷ From the outset of the founding of the Republic the Dutch realized they lacked a clear common identity. What they used to create a national "republican"

³⁷ Ann Jensen Adams, "The Cultural Power of Portrait: The Market, Interpersonal Experience, and Subjectivity" in Ann Jensen Adams, *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland: Portraiture and the Production of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23-24.

outlook was the combination of applied history, political theory, myth, theology and social structures. However, it should be noted that those who formulated these new identities were those considered the upper class of society.

Outside the need for a national identity the change from an aristocratic to a “republican” society also initiated alterations within the socially stratified divisions of the Dutch Republic. These divisions soon became defined by income and identifying factors that the upper elite established such as behavioral and communal identifiers.³⁸ Art historians have argued that the upper classes of society used the ownership of both “high-life” genre paintings and luxury objects to set themselves apart from the other levels of society. I agree with this line of thought and will discuss porcelain and “high-life” genre paintings within this context.

It is important to address the shift in Dutch genre painting and the collecting habits of Dutch burghers after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Peace throughout the Dutch Republic allowed for more disposable income to be allocated in the purchase of luxury goods. In the Republic, large amounts of money were spent on consumer goods not just for household management, but also for the expression of identity.³⁹ By carefully choosing specific objects people were able to claim they belonged to certain groups, or distinguish themselves from one another. While we cannot claim to know the exact extent of the way contemporary audiences would have fully displayed their identities or the types of conversations that occurred, we can make inferences from the evidence found in

³⁸ Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 11-14.

³⁹ Jan van Campen and Titus M. Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers 2014), 203.

written accounts and their art. The wealthy patricians and merchants who invested in family and individual portraits also invested in “high-life” genre painting. There is a definite change in genre paintings after 1648. Past art historical theories suggest that during this time of growing prosperity codes of civility developed among the Dutch elite. Scholars following this line of thought argue that members of the upper class refined their standards of social attitudes as they gradually subscribed to evolving codes of manners, gestures, dress, and more. These evolving codes were then reflected in the art of the time, especially “high-life” genre paintings.⁴⁰

Paintings reached the status of high-quality luxury items. Works were composed to feature interiors of elite homes, Pieter de Hooch’s *The Greeting*, c. 1675 (Figure 4) is an example of this shift. Painters like De Hooch began creating works such as these with new levels of refinement by incorporating images with detailed renderings of textures, objects, and spaces in conjunction with distinguished lighting effects and compositions. This displays the changes occurring within the compositional elements to meet the shift in the types of consumers acquiring images. These sophisticated scenes typically featured fewer figures in more intimate settings. The four figures seen in the composition are placed around a square table covered by an oriental rug, one woman stands in the center of the frame. The opulence of the space is reflected by figures dressed in elaborate finery. The viewer’s eye is immediately drawn to the standing woman. Her pale silk dress is illuminated as she is presented mostly from behind. The viewer’s eye follows her right arm, which is extended to shake hands with a gentleman at the right side of the frame.

⁴⁰ Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 94-210.

Paintings such as this one illustrate the direct result of economic prosperity that produced individual circumstances where a new social and financial elite emerged along with changing aesthetic preferences.

I agree that shifts in the concept of civility affected the art markets but I think that this oversimplifies in what way “high-life” genre paintings were understood. The reception of these works of art and the way in which they were both displayed and viewed would have been a factor in how these images were constructed and marketed. “High-life” genre paintings were more than just reflections of the standards of behavior held by the upper class; they were works of artifice. These images presented their spectators with the opportunity to discuss and participate in rituals of civility.⁴¹ For example, interpretations of paintings like Caspar Netscher’s *Company Making Music*, c.1665 (Figure 5), would not have been limited to moral codes of conduct. The details rendered within this image including fine textures and accessories would have also signified other types of associations. The intimate setting features a man and woman seated at a table turned towards a finely dressed woman standing to the right. The accessories include an oriental rug draped over the table, a porcelain vase, and sheet music in the standing woman’s hand while the seated gentleman plays a lute. Again much of the background is in shadow while the light illuminates the man’s elaborate slashed sleeves and the front of the standing woman, specifically her face, chest and silk dress.

The Dutch elite purchased “high-life” genre paintings such as these to display in their homes for family and guests to view and discuss. The painted details included by

⁴¹ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 95.

artists like Netscher were artfully chosen to speak to the relationship between artistic decisions and contemporary fashion. For example well-to-do children and young adults participated in musical events, musical gatherings were an enjoyable commonplace activity among the upper class.⁴² This combination of subject matter and items like the porcelain vase may have provided an opportunity for viewers to openly discuss pastimes and collecting to further solidify their social standing. The fact that this type of painting would have been carefully constructed speaks to the audience's aspirational goals.

I therefore argue that the inclusion of porcelain in "high-life" genre paintings played a role in the formation of the upper elite's identity. These types of identity associations are also evident within interior group portraits during this time. Dutch burgher's interests in specific intellectual circles and fields of study along with their collecting habits would have influenced what items artists chose to depict in paintings. Images such as Nicolaes Maes' *Interior with the Dordrecht Family*, c.1656 places the family in a setting that speaks to their identity. The family composition is linear, the father at left stands slightly behind three children, the youngest, a baby, is seated on the mother's lap at the right. The two older children are linked by holding opposite handles of a basket full of fruit. The dark wood paneling on the right wall behind the mother features a plate rail displaying porcelain; above the porcelain a lower portion of a painting frame is visible. The window in the background provides a water view of Dordrecht.

⁴² Piet Bakker, Blaise Ducos, Adriaan E. Waiboer, and Arthur K. Wheelock, *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2017), 58.

Images like Maes' speak to the family's status, prioritizing what they chose to be associated with. The two porcelain plates flanking the porcelain bowl is a dominant feature in the composition. I would argue that it is possible the family may have wanted this motif included within the composition. It could associate them with trade and their economic standing or both. This may also speak to their educational background and understanding of the world around them. Paintings such as these displayed in the homes of the elite may have been placed alongside luxury goods and natural wonders. Artists had to consider how this might affect the reception of their work. Angel pointed this out in his speech:

Then in addition to this sweet-flowing naturalness there is the fourth, a pleasingly decorative richness which imparts no less a gloss to art...One sees this daily in those who enrich their paintings and works with it, drawing the delighted eye of art-lovers eagerly to their works, with the result that the paintings sell more readily. We should set great store by the depiction of decorative richness, because of its great advantage to us.⁴³

Porcelain was a thoughtful inclusion within works of art such as the paintings by Netscher and Maes discussed above. The next chapter will address the associations invoked in the viewer between porcelain, the exotic, and worldly knowledge.

⁴³ Angel, Hoyle, and Miedema, "Praise of Painting," 223-224.

CHAPTER TWO

The Culture of the “Exotic” in the Dutch Republic: The Dutch Fascination with Porcelain

When viewing a “high-life” genre painting such as Caspar Netscher’s *Company Making Music*, c. 1665 (Figure 5), analysis should not be limited to a moralistic interpretation. As I discussed in chapter 1 the details rendered in these works including fine fabrics and accessories may have invoked other types of associations. My main focus is on the presence of porcelain within works such as Netscher’s. The inclusion of porcelain as a motif was thoughtful and specific and has largely been ignored by art historians due to their focus on the presence of porcelain in still life paintings. Why would an artist take the time to include a blue and white Ming vase in a “high-life” genre scene? What types of associations would this bring about for their audience? This chapter will focus on Dutch trade with China, Dutch nationalistic pride in their trade networks and how this pride led to them “othering” the people and objects of China, seeing China as an “exotic” world. It is imperative to address the evolution of the Dutch economy that influenced international trade relations.

The financial transformation in the Dutch Republic following the Peace of Westphalia allowed for a commercial infrastructure that served both local and foreign

traders. This led to favorable conditions for trade within and outside of the Dutch Republic.⁴⁴ Commercial infrastructure such as the Bank of Amsterdam and the Dutch Stock Exchange combined with maritime insurance policies allowed for this economic growth. A growing population also played a role. By the 1650's the Dutch population doubled in size, as a result the tertiary sector comprised of service workers became one of the higher paid segments of society.⁴⁵ These individuals worked in trade, shipping and finance. During this period of trade network expansion, the Dutch Republic's relationship to foreign cultures was developed through textual, visual, and material goods. Drawing on these accounts and images, artists integrated porcelain in their paintings. The apparent realism (discussed in the previous chapter) created by the artists enhanced the associations and juxtapositions where porcelain is placed in interiors with other luxury commodities that were favored by the elite. These associations included ideas on "Chineseness", meaning Dutch societal comprehension of Chinese material culture, as well as pride in the success of Fatherland and its growing economy. It is possible to try and reconstruct what types of conversations about art and society may have occurred between the upper classes of the Dutch Republic by analyzing poems, travel guides, art treaties, connoisseurship manuals, and artist biographies.⁴⁶ We can deduce from these sources that the existence of Dutch maritime enterprises was deeply ingrained in the Republic's identity.

⁴⁴ For more information see Helmers and Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion*, 159-160.

⁴⁵ North, *Art and Commerce*, 30-31.

⁴⁶ This idea is presented in Angela K. Ho's book *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 65.

Dutch Aspiration to Trade with Asia as Facilitated by the Creation of the VOC

Prior to the foundation of the new Republic in 1588, the Netherlands already had well-established trade with northern and western Europe. The financial growth that occurred during this period was the inspiration for expansion of global trade. Innovations in the shipbuilding industry reduced costs and risks associated with long sea journeys through new ship designs and the introduction of divided ship ownership. Advanced development of their banking systems and stock exchange allowed merchants more opportunities in the exchange of foreign currency and goods. These expansions led to a more regulated financial sector of the Dutch Republic, establishing an international clearing system for bills of exchange.⁴⁷ Private companies were working to establish global connections, as a result of their focus on profitable trade in spices, textiles and precious metals. Their interest was reinforced by the 1596 publication of Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's *Itinerario*. The author, stationed in Goa by a Portuguese archbishop, took vital information from Portugal on ships navigating in the area of the East Indies and published it for the Dutch.⁴⁸ The indication of Portuguese success in intra-Asian trade was a deciding factor in the establishment of the VOC by the States General in The Hague on March 20, 1602. The States General established the VOC through a charter merging six companies.⁴⁹

The VOC was the first major joint stock company with shares traded publicly on the stock exchange. It consisted of six "chambers", based in six Dutch cities, each of

⁴⁷ North, *Art and Commerce*, 39.

⁴⁸ Helmers and Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion*, 168.

⁴⁹ Onnekink and Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World*, 32-34.

which were required to provide a set percentage of the company's total investment capital and ships, receiving in return a matching share in all Asian commodities brought into the Republic.⁵⁰ It is important to note that the VOC charter specified a monopoly on all Dutch trade from the Cape of Good Hope east to the Strait of Magellan for a period of twenty-one years. This charter was extended and re-negotiated on a regular basis.⁵¹ Accordingly, no other company in the Dutch Republic would be permitted to sail past the Cape of Good Hope.⁵² Due to the length of time and geographic distance required of these long journeys, VOC officers were given diplomatic, military, and judicial power needed to relay information, and most importantly officers had the power to act immediately in any given situation.

One of the most important trade routes lay between China and Japan.⁵³ Through this route the VOC aspired to dominate trade with Asia. At the beginning of the 17th century the Portuguese led the trade with their well-established relationship with China.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ The chambers were located in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. Seventeen delegate members made up a board of directors called the *Heren XVII*, they appointed the governor-general and the Council of the Indies. For more information see Onnekink and Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World*, 34.

⁵¹ Helmers and Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion*, 169.

⁵² Onnekink and Rommelse, *The Dutch in the Early Modern World*, 34.

⁵³ Trade with China was limited in the early part of the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1600. The Ming court brought back Han ethnic rule in China, re-establishing a tribute system that limited outside party access to their markets. In 1523 all outside trade was banned, this ban was lifted at the end of the 16th century allowing European powers greater access to trade opportunities with China. The maritime exploration by the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and the English formed the beginning of a global network that would lead to exchanges in goods, information, ideas and beliefs. See Julie Emerson, Jennifer Chen, and Mimi Gardner Gates, *Porcelain Stories: from China to Europe* (Seattle, WA: Seattle Art Museum in association with the University of Washington Press, 2000), 88-89.

⁵⁴ Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, discovered the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope in 1499. This provided a faster route to Asia. The Portuguese maritime

The Dutch tried to take over the shipments from the Portuguese by attacking their settlements around Macao as well as capturing their ships as prizes.⁵⁵ The first time the Dutch saw porcelain in any significant quantities was when it arrived in Holland in the form of booty captured from the Portuguese. In March 1602, the colossal Portuguese ship the *San Jago*, was captured off the island of St. Helena with a large cargo of porcelain and other Chinese goods.⁵⁶ The cargo was confiscated and sold at auction in the Netherlands, marking the first large influx of porcelain on the Dutch market. The introduction of porcelain coincided with an expansion of the Dutch economy. The rapidly increasing group of wealthy burghers could afford to invest in luxury goods, ensuring a market for porcelain.

The VOC waged war with China for some time in an effort to force the country to trade in spices, metals, silk, and porcelain.⁵⁷ After many naval battles the officers realized that warfare was not the best strategy to achieve their goal. They entered negotiations with China and finally established a trade agreement in 1624. The Chinese government allowed them to settle in Taiwan, keeping the Dutch out of the Chinese mainland while maintaining the economic benefits of commerce. The fact that the Dutch could not subjugate China combined with Chinese non-interest in European goods, resulted in

exploration enabled them to send missions to China establishing trading activities in 1513. This allowed for a gradual expansion into Macao while paying rent to the Ming Dynasty. See Emerson, Chen, and Gates, *Porcelain Stories*, 24-26.

⁵⁵ Christiaan Jorg, "Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century: Trading Networks and Private Enterprise" in *The Porcelains of Jingdezhen Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia No. 16*, (June 1992): 183-184.

⁵⁶ Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade*, 124. Van Campen and Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain*, 38.

⁵⁷ Jorg, "Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century," 24-26.

China having more control than the Dutch over trade relations. They strictly regulated all commodity goods entering and exiting the mainland.⁵⁸ Dutch embassies to the court of the emperor in Beijing attempted to set up a direct trade route but this proved unsuccessful. The Emperor prohibited Dutch merchants from trading in their port cities. There was no direct trade between the Dutch and Chinese in China in the 17th century.⁵⁹ The porcelain trade relationship with China was not entirely successful until around 1635. At that point the VOC flooded the Dutch market with porcelain until the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644.⁶⁰ It wasn't until 1683 when the Qing dynasty fully established their rule over China that the new ban on exports was lifted.⁶¹

Most of the Chinese porcelain that reached the Netherlands came through Formosa (Taiwan), from hijacked Portuguese ships, or from Chinese merchants trading in Batavia.⁶² Batavia, an important Dutch settlement for their trade with Asia, was established as their administrative center in 1619 on Java (in modern day Jakarta, Indonesia). The Dutch conquered the existing town of Jayakarta, burning it to the ground, and renamed the site Batavia. The Governor General, Jan Pietersz, of the VOC founded the fort of Batavia in this area. The Dutch needed a settlement in close proximity to the spice growing regions of Asia and their markets. He chose this region due to its strategic

⁵⁸ It was specified that there would be no free trade between China and Taiwan. See Jorg, "Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century" 184-185. Karina Corrigan, Jan van Campen, Femke Diercks, and Janet C. Blyberg, *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2015), 24.

⁵⁹ The Dutch were able to establish direct trade with China in the 18th century.

⁶⁰ During the years of 1644-1681 the Dutch relied on Japan, and their own potters in Delft to make porcelain or imitations of porcelain for home markets.

⁶¹ Jorg, "Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century," 194.

⁶² Corrigan, Van Campen, Diercks, and Blyberg, *Asia in Amsterdam*, 24.

placement in the archipelago, from this vantage point trading posts could be set up across the Indian Ocean.⁶³ From here the governor-general and his council managed their vast overseas networks.

Dutch Ideology: The Dutch fascination with “Exotic” China

There were many ways that traded commodities could be imbued with nationalistic narratives of commercial history in the Dutch Republic. These narratives can be understood through their written and visual sources such as travel journals, letters, newspapers, ethnographies, histories, chronicles, paintings, etchings, maps, globes, sculptures, and collections of exotica. Pride in the impressive achievements of Dutch trade speaks through texts and images. Paintings like the ones previously discussed included images of porcelain within their compositions. Wealthy burgher families who collected both porcelain and paintings would have understood the inclusion of luxury goods, such as porcelain in these images as an inference to their trade networks and acquired wealth that resulted from products of trade.

In Dutch daily life, trade acquired patriotic value due to the financial benefits it brought to the Fatherland.⁶⁴ This association can be seen in the 1637 poem by Joost van Vondel, which celebrated the Dutch global reach:

Great Java yields to us her treasures rich,
China her porcelain. We of Amsterdam
Sail to all coasts and seas where profit calls,

⁶³ North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*, 36-37. Helmers and Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion*, 169.

⁶⁴ Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, 233-234.

Even to the Ganges meeting with the waves.
 For love of grain no port is strange to us.
 With Portugal we share the sea and land,
 And rest from strife with one who's ceded much.
 Who doubts, may cast his eye on town and fortress:
 I'll show him other towns, another Fatherland
 With different stars. So Empires are exchanged:
 Our harvest garnered from such widespread fields
 That one vast Indian warehouse holds the East.⁶⁵

This poem demonstrates that Dutch contemporary audiences saw their dominance of overseas trade as a result of their outstanding moral righteousness. The “exotic” Asia in the Dutch imagination fueled the demand for Asian goods like porcelain. The arrival of those goods in turn fed their curiosity in Asian cultures. The Dutch Republic served as Europe’s leading producer of exotica in the form of books, paintings and delftware.⁶⁶ This was a result of their highly successful trade markets, printing presses, and artisan workshops.

Johan Nieuhof’s travelogue titled *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Great Tartar Cham Emperor of China, Delivered by their excellences Peter de Goyer, and Jacob De Keyser at his Imperial City of Peking*, is an important source to consider. The subtitle of the travel account is written as follows: “Wherein the Cities, Towns, Villages, Ports, Rivers etc. in their Passages from Canton to Peking are Ingeniously Described by Mr. Johan Nieuhof, Steward to the

⁶⁵ Quotes in Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 257-258.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe’s Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 5-6.

Ambassadors.”⁶⁷ The travel account is broken down into different chapters on the Embassy’s travels through China from Canton to Beijing and then various chapters on the plants, animals, architecture, religion, and customs. While the book is published under Johan Nieuhof’s name, in reality it is comprised of several texts and eyewitness accounts that have been combined to create one book.⁶⁸ Nieuhof went to China with the VOC embassy to Beijing giving a sense of authority to his observations. The book was produced as an account of the embassy, but it doubles as a description of the Chinese lands, people, and culture. Even though Nieuhof was present in China, it does not mean that his eyewitness account was accurate. It uses several other accounts and is imbued with European biases “othering” an entire culture. The account often refers to the Chinese as “Idolaters”, “Heathens”, “Gluttons”, and so on. This coupled with the descriptions of sacrifices, cunning men, and ‘odd’ traditions painted a picture of the Dutch as moral and upright civilized Europeans versus the “uncivilized” or “exotic” Chinese.⁶⁹

However, these types of publications on foreign countries and cultures created a new way the Dutch consumed information on the expanding world. Images and text were part of a framework through which the Dutch saw China, and that framing in turn shaped the imagery in Dutch art. Porcelain’s presence in “high-life” genre paintings is an example of how these frameworks come together in one medium. Using the passages

⁶⁷ Johan Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China, Deliver’d by Their Excellencies, Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer, at His Imperial City of Peking / John Ogilby, W. Hollar, Grav. Joan Ogilby, Johan Nieuhoff, Pieter de Goyer... et Al, Aut. Du Texte*. Translation by John Ogilby (London, 1669), 3.

⁶⁸ Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 25.

⁶⁹ Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 27, 56.

from this source one can infer the types of associations and conversations that may have surrounded “high-life” genre paintings. The use of engravings in these types of publications rendered Dutch travelers and publishers not only as geographers, but also the eyes of the Republic.⁷⁰ What they observed and surveyed, made viewable the “exotic” world for the rest of their countrymen. This defined not only the people of Asia but also the visual language used in Dutch art to symbolize foreign cultures.

It is important to review Nieuhof’s account to understand not only how the Dutch regarded the Asian world but China and its people. This helps scholars deduce what contemporary audiences may have discussed when viewing porcelain within genre paintings kept in their homes. Throughout the travel account, the way the Chinese people were presented depended on their location and title. Government officials and craftsmen are described more favorably than merchants. This is seen in Nieuhof’s statement; “It is almost incredible for anybody to believe (unless they had seen it) in what state and pomp these Idolaters and Heathen princes live, and with what good orders their people are governed.”⁷¹ The description of the craftsmen from the same city was “ingenious, laborious, and nimble, and can imitate anything which they have seen made before them.”⁷² Calling the Chinese people “idolaters” and “heathen princes” placed them at a level above the Indonesians who had been subjugated by the Dutch but still below the Dutch themselves. However, the account of salesmen in China is very different:

⁷⁰ Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 85.

⁷¹ Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 42.

⁷² Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 34.

The shops of chief citizens and merchants are filled with all manner of rich Chinese wears, as cottons, Silk stuffs, China dishes, pearls, diamonds etc.... they have here, as through all China, no coined money, but they pay for such commodities by small pieces of silver, which are different value and weights... you must always have a pair of scales about you, if you will not be cheated in the weight of the crafty Chinese...for they have commonly two sorts of weights by them, and are so nimble and deceitful in their balancing, that you need of Argus eyes when you buy anything of them.⁷³

These accounts make it a point only to describe the Chinese and their bartering for exported goods. Those who are involved in crafting and diplomacy are praised while the actual merchants are seen as deceitful. Travel accounts like the one written by Nieuhof circulated knowledge of China and its people to audiences at home. A proliferation of books about China followed Nieuhof's publication.⁷⁴ The Dutch market was full of information by European authors who may or may not have been to China.

Cornelis de Man's *Interior with a Woman Sweeping*, c.1666 depicts the interior of a room with an open door in the left corner framing a woman sweeping in the background. The interior depicts items that signify wealth including a checkered tile floor and two paintings. In the center of the back wall a male cloak hangs on the paneling. The bright red oriental rug draped across the table creates a focal point. Visible on the chair is a string instrument. The tabletop has a piece of white fabric and a porcelain jug, emerging from the folds of the oriental rug are a book and the hilt of a sword. The featured items within the composition allude to the fact that this area of the home would have been a male domain. The hilt of the sword and the cloak hanging on the back wall provide

⁷³ Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 81.

⁷⁴ Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 27-47.

evidence to confirm this assessment. I would argue that the items on the table including the sword, oriental rug, book, porcelain jug and musical instrument may attest to the man's social status and occupation. This links the man of the home to the vast trade networks of the Dutch while speaking to his worldly knowledge. This presents the man as someone with ties to overseas trade, however it also speaks to how foreign objects are intergraded into Dutch visual and material culture. The presence of the porcelain jug would have immediately created associations with China for contemporary audiences.

The explanation of the Chinese people provided an avenue for the Dutch to compare Chinese culture to their own. When creating their own history the Dutch believed that their own superiority in the maritime arena, trade, and mercantile ventures was a result of their moral superiority that centered on a stable home life where sobriety, family and education prevailed. By describing Chinese craftsmen in a favorable light they may have placed these types of associations upon the porcelain product by viewing it as expertly crafted. Meanwhile the description of China's merchants as deceitful shows the Dutch belief in their moral superiority. Wealthy burghers would have owned travel accounts such as these in addition to other publications about naturalia and art. Travel accounts were an integral part of their education and critical in their ability to demonstrate their worldly knowledge among their peers. The use of this knowledge and the collection of luxury items, spoke to their cultural standing and status in the Dutch Republic. I argue that the type of associations Nieuhof's account provided were a point of reference for discussions of worldly knowledge and the exotic when wealthy burghers viewed and discussed genre paintings.

Dutch Interest in Porcelain Production: Worldly Knowledge

With the rise in the Dutch global trade networks and economic prosperity, new consumption patterns emerged within the upper class. This is an exclusive socioeconomic group with annual incomes in excess of 1000 guilders and only amounted to between 6-8% of the urban population.⁷⁵ Consumers incorporated luxury objects such as porcelain into their customs and practices, creating a new cultural framework that endowed those items with new meanings. The fascination and popularity of porcelain was partially due to the fact that the Dutch did not possess the understanding to produce porcelain back in the Republic. During the 17th century China was the only manufacturer of porcelain. In *Interior with an older lady, a young woman with a child*, painted by an unknown artist in the first half of the 1660s, porcelain is one of the dominant items featured throughout the piece. In the foreground, piles of dishes with several blue and white porcelain pieces are placed on the black and white tile floor. The main figure of a woman stands at a table holding yet more porcelain. The artist has paid close attention to rendering the different types of porcelain plates, vases, and saucers within this image. On the back wall the artist has included two landscape paintings showing what I believe is an intentional placement of porcelain with other luxury items. This illustrates the Dutch fascination with porcelain as a luxury object and its importance to the cultural framework of the Dutch Republic.

Dutch consumers coveted porcelain because of its association with the “exotic”. These associations contributed to the way in which the Dutch created, identified,

⁷⁵ John Loughman, and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 21.

understood, and incorporated Chinese culture within the Dutch Republic. In order for the wealthy members of society to participate in the discerning acquisition of high-quality porcelain pieces they needed the expert knowledge to select the “right” types of porcelain. The Dutch fascination with porcelain colored their views and their understating of the Chinese people and culture. Even the name “China” references this luxury item. Over the course of the early modern period, exotic place names came to stand for exotic goods. The term “chinaware” is seen in Dutchman Johan Nieuhof’s 1665 travel publication and was later shortened to “china”.⁷⁶ This soon became a generic term for imported ceramic plates, bowls, tea services, and so on. Place names for the Dutch became representative of the consumable things and luxury items they created and traded.

The majority of Dutch consumers associated China with its luxury goods. Again, Nieuhof’s account is an important source that illuminates the way in which the Dutch viewed porcelain as a metonym that represented China. Nieuhof makes this point in his analysis of porcelain and its production when describing the city Jingdezhen:

...The chiefest trade is in porcelain, or China dishes, which is to be had there in great abundance. The inhabitants of this village told us (to our great admiration) that there was no better porcelain made in all the Kingdom of China, then in the Village *Sinktefimo*, which lay at least 100 miles east word from this village, near to the city *Feuleang*, the fourth small city of the second chief city of *Joacheu*...and that the inhabitants here were not able to make it, because they knew not how to temper the water, which alleged to be the only reason why they could not make it. And though I saw not those cities... nor how they take the soil in one place, and porcelain made their oven another; yet I will relate it to you in

⁷⁶ Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 227-228.

short what account was given to me by persons of credit, resident in this village of *Vicenjen* (Jingdezhen).⁷⁷

Nieuhof continues to explain to the best of his knowledge the manner in which porcelain is made:

The earth where of this porcelain is made, is digging gray quantity out of the mountains situated near the chief city *Hoeicheu*, in the providence of *Nanking* from whence it is brought in four-square Clods to the above mountains village, what's have the Emperor's arms stamped upon them to prevent all manner of deceit... Upon the great pots which are made of this earth, they have an art to themselves to paint all manner of creatures, flowers, and trees, which they so very cautiously only with Indico: this artist painting upon the pots is kept so private and secret that they will not teach it to any but their children and near relations; where in the Chinese are so dexterous, that you cannot show them anything, but they will imitate upon their pots and dishes, which being framed and made of this earth, are first dried in the sun before their baked in the oven; and when they are thoroughly dried their put in an oven... after the expiration of 30 days, the furnace is opened in the presence of an officer appointed by the Emperor to take an account of this earthenware, entry see the emperors of duty, which is of each sort the best piece according to law of the kingdom; the rest they afterward sell to the inhabitants of this village, where (as they say) is the staple of this porcelain trade, which is sent from this village not only through all China, but also through the whole world.⁷⁸

Passages such as these show the Dutch fascination with not only porcelain but also the people who made this luxury item. The passage above describes the artisans as dexterous but also secretive. He praises their ability to paint all manner of creatures, flowers and

⁷⁷ Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 70-71. The word Jingdezhen in the parentheses is my own addition.

⁷⁸ Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company*, 71.

trees. He goes on to claim, “that you cannot show them anything, but they will imitate upon their pots and dishes.” The Dutch fascination with both the product and artisans producing the porcelain is due to the fact that the Dutch are unable to create porcelain themselves.⁷⁹ Information on porcelain production was also exchanged by word of mouth from mariners and merchants, through private correspondence, and in printed newspapers, price currents, and maps. Consumer knowledge of production enhanced their ability to collect and display the “right” quality porcelain products. Additionally oil paintings provide some of the best visual testimony of the Republic’s fascination with porcelain.

Gabriel Metsu’s *Woman Sewing with a Parrot*, c.1661-64 shows a seated woman with needlework in her lap. She is in three-quarter profile facing the left side of the frame where a small round table has a blue parrot perched outside his cage. A large porcelain bowl is located just above her head on top of a cupboard. Past art historians have noted that the presence of a parrot perched outside of a cage may symbolize sexual connotations within works of art. It may be a play on words because the Dutch word “vogelen” meaning birding also refers to the act of engaging in sexual intercourse.⁸⁰ A moralizing reading of this image may look at the bird’s interruption of the women as she sews as a comment on the women’s loose morals. Additionally, I would argue that the compositional arrangement of a woman sewing featuring both a parrot and porcelain

⁷⁹ Europeans had to go directly to China to purchase porcelain. This did not end until the 1800s when the British were the first to discover the type of clay and process needed to produce porcelain; for more information see Emerson, Chen, and Gates, *Porcelain Stories*.

⁸⁰ De Jongh and Hoyle, *Questions of Meaning*, 22-58.

bowl may also associate her with the wealth amassed by the Dutch through their trade networks.

Contemporary audiences would have recognized these objects and inferred the knowledge and wealth necessary to own exotica. I do not think that there is a single interpretive message for every genre painting. Artistic technique would have created complex compositions that could speak to multiple readings of a single painting. The inclusion of porcelain may have led to discussions on information from accounts such as Nieuhof's about how porcelain was created and why the material would have been precious to own. The artists' interest seems to reflect the insights that Dutchman would have had when handling a piece of Chinese ceramics. Nieuhof's account wasn't the only source that discussed China in relation to porcelain, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's earlier publication *Itinerario* did as well:

To tell of the porcelain made it there, is to be believe, and those that are exported yearly to India, Portugal, in nova Hispania and elsewhere! But the finest are not allowed outside the country on penalty of capital punishment, but Service solely for the Lord and governors of the country and is so exquisite that no crystalline glasses is to be compared with them. These porcelains are made in the land of the earth which is very hard, which is pounded to pieces or ground, and they leave it to soak in through cuts out of stone, and when it is well soaked and frequently stirred as milk is turned to make butter, they make of that which floats on top the finest works, and after that somewhat lower courser, and so on, they paint them and make them those figures and likeness they want and then they are dried and baked in the kiln.⁸¹

⁸¹ Quoted in Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art*, 68.

This draws a connection not only to the genre paintings discussed so far but also to images such as *Family at a Dinner Table*, attributed to Quiringh Gerritsz. van Brekelenkam, c. 1658-60 (Figure 6). Family portraits in settings within the home featuring domestic rituals and luxury items speak to the status of the family. Five figures gather around a table that is covered by fine linens, silverware, and plates with what appears to be cheese and bread. Additional signifiers of status include the black and white tile flooring, cupboard with five porcelain pieces placed on top, three paintings, two portraits, and a mirror. The open door on the back wall to the right of the cupboard shows the back of a maid most likely preparing food. The display of porcelain on top of an expensive cupboard alongside paintings would also speak to their collecting habits. These types of images tie wealthy burghers visually to the act of collecting and displaying wealth to their peers.

I believe these types of paintings and the way in which porcelain was displayed in the home can be seen as an act to control and domesticate the “exotic.” Porcelain here is representative of control and, therefore, synonymous with power. I am using the term “power” here to define the Dutch view as one that controlled the narrative on porcelain within the Republic. By importing porcelain as an investment and exotic luxury item, coupled with its inclusion in paintings, the Dutch are giving the appearance that they command the object.⁸² In a time when humanistic learning was evolving, collecting as a

⁸² As pointed out earlier in this chapter China had more control over trade and production within their territory. The Dutch wanted to show the illusion of control by bringing this object back to the Republic and using it in their art and homes to symbolize both “exotic” China and social constructs within their culture. See Jorg, “Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century.”

secular activity was important for the upper classes to demonstrate their knowledge in a wide range of subjects. As I contended earlier, this is tied to the way in which the outside world is associated with the commodities they traded and in turn associated with the Dutch economy. Elite taste such as the VOC's demand for European shaped porcelain with Chinese decoration controlled the export of porcelain and the identity of that product.

In 1635, a letter from the Dutch officers in Batavia to Taiwan asked for them to purchase porcelain pieces from China that are “painted curiously and skillfully, with Chinese persons on foot and on horseback, water, landscapes, pleasure-houses, their boats, birds and animals...all that is well liked in Europe.”⁸³ Then in another letter dated July 1635, the Dutch criticize a previous batch sent to their markets. They stated “the new sort of *pierings* or table plates should be finer and painted more nicely; they look too much like the earthenware that is made in Holland.”⁸⁴ This along with the commissioning of specific shapes shows the ability of the Dutch to create a new product by directing specific types of production of Chinese material goods for European consumer society.⁸⁵ The commissioning of specific shapes and painted images on porcelain illustrates the “taste” of consumers in this market. By “taste” I am referring to a set of specific standards to which the wealthy burghers would be expected to conform.⁸⁶ For the Dutch it is highly significant to note that material culture is at the heart of both the travelers’

⁸³ Quoted in Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade*, 137.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade*, 137.

⁸⁵ Stacey Pierson, *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 44.

⁸⁶ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 44.

account of China and its people. The fact that publications as early as 1596 through to the late 1600s focused on the production of porcelain and the knowledge needed to identify the material shows the worldly knowledge needed by elite burghers in both the business and social realm. In turn authors, printers and painters became cultural commentators who devised a distinct visual language for the representation of “Chineseness” where porcelain was at the forefront. This is something that cannot be overlooked when examining its presence in “high-life” genre paintings. Therefore, it is clear that these types of associations can be linked to genre images.

Artists took the time to include porcelain in genre scenes for a reason. The oriental rug and porcelain bowl located in the foreground of Johannes Vermeer’s *A Maid Asleep*, c.1656-57 (Figure 7), draws the viewer’s eye with their color combinations. The inclusion of blue and white porcelain as a motif draws the eye to the foreground underscoring the artist’s inclusion of this object. This provided opportunities for associations with the Dutch wealth resulting from their trade networks. The rest of the composition features a muted color palette. The maid’s skin is almost the same shade as the back wall and her dress is the same color as the background in the oriental rug, only her large white collar prevents her from blending into the background entirely. Meanwhile the blue in the rug at the center, draws the eye to the fruit and porcelain bowl. While this image has been interpreted as a moral lesson about the maid neglecting her duties, I think it is important to note the richness of the objects in front of her. Vermeer made the artistic choice to crowd the left foreground with not only an oriental rug but also the porcelain bowl filled with fruit. Contemporary viewers would have recognized

multiple layers of meaning behind an image such as this. Although they may have acknowledged the scene as a woman neglecting her duties in the home, it is doubtful that they would have disregarded the luxury items included in the composition. Due to the fact that images such as these would have been located in the home, this provided opportunities for wealthy burghers and their guests to have numerous viewings and conversations. This allowed viewers to have multiple interpretations of the artist's complex compositions. Porcelain as a motif implied wealth and prestige to contemporary viewers. This may have led to discussions on the trade networks and imported commodities.

In the Republic, large amounts of money were spent on consumer goods not just for household management, but also for the expression of identity.⁸⁷ By carefully choosing specific objects people were able to claim they belonged to certain groups, or distinguish themselves from one another. While we cannot claim to know the exact extent of the way contemporary audiences would have fully displayed their identities or types of conversations that occurred, we can make inferences from the evidence found in written accounts and their art. Johannes Vermeer's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, c.1662-64 portrays a woman in profile gazing into a mirror in an interior. She is wearing a pale-yellow fur trimmed jacket, her raised hands hold out a pearl necklace that is around her neck, she also wears pearl earrings and an orange bow in her hair. There is a dark cloth, possibly an item of clothing draped over the left side of the table next to a large, dark porcelain vase. The light originating from the window illuminates personal items

⁸⁷ Van Campen and Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain*, 203.

including a brush and porcelain bowl directly in front of her. When considering the inclusion of a large porcelain vase and bowl in the composition in conjunction with the pearl necklace, pearl earrings and fur trimmed finery the artist has portrayed an abundance of luxury items. The scale in which these luxury goods are presented may have been viewed by contemporary women wishing to emulate these practices.

Thijs Weststeijn's scholarship presents convincing observations about how a Dutch burgher bought luxury goods to express status and wealth. An individual's reputation found expression in the objects with which they surrounded themselves. For porcelain, the quality of the craftsmanship determined the value. Therefore, expert knowledge became more important for choosing the right types of objects. Elite burghers strove to display their ability to choose the right objects and to appreciate the quality of the objects in front of their peers.⁸⁸ Their decision to purchase luxury goods could have been prompted by their desire to either express status or serve as an investment or both. This formed what Weststeijn termed a type of cultural capital of the self-assured 17th century citizen. While still life paintings have been extensively analyzed in these types of contexts, the discussion on porcelain's presence in "high-life" genre scenes has been understudied in the art historical field.

Pieter de Hooch's *Leisure Time in an Elegant Setting* c.1663-65 (Figure 8) is a rendering of an exquisite gilded leather room with a marble floor in a home setting. What appears to be a family group gathers around a table in the back left corner of the room. A painting hangs next to an open window that illuminates a table draped with an oriental

⁸⁸ Van Campen and Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain*, 203- 204.

rug. The lavish gilded leather walls dominate the space where a cupboard is located in the center of the back wall. Two porcelain bowls are placed at the corners of the cupboard on either side of a painting. The ownership and placement of paintings such as these within the homes of wealthy burghers are the type of cultural capital that Weststeijn is referencing. The opulence of the room with marble flooring, gilded leather, expensive furniture, an oriental rug and porcelain may have been something the upper classes of society strove for. Such paintings may have been placed in the same space with their collections of porcelain to symbolize worldly knowledge in front of peers.

Scholars mainly focus on still life paintings as some of the best examples of images displaying imported luxury goods. While I agree that still life paintings display the abundance of both international and national markets I feel that “high-life” genre paintings do so in similar ways. Still life usually displays tables full of international and national goods in a sparse setting offering a limited view of how these objects may have spoken to a person’s identity. The fact that “high-life” genre paintings are sophisticated scenes that display intimate settings within the home speaks to audiences “taste.” Genre scenes allowed luxury goods, like porcelain, to be incorporated into a scene that displays a wealthy home, and how figures may have interacted with these objects. These are works of artifice and as a result they presented owners with the opportunity to discuss and possibly strive for these levels of refinement. As I have argued and demonstrated “exotic” China was symbolized and referenced through the export of their porcelain. However, it is my belief that this is further complicated by artistic conventions, which also domesticated the image of porcelain. Through the use of this motif and the physical

object both men and women were able to identify themselves as someone who is a part of a specific group. Porcelain therefore not only symbolizes the “exotic” and worldly knowledge but also symbolizes Dutch cultural ideals. These ideals enter the realm of both wealthy men and women, although the genre of “high-life” domestic scenes is believed to have painted these two worlds as completely separate from one another. The next chapter will explore these diverging themes and ideas.

CHAPTER THREE

“High-Life” Genre Paintings in the Home: Fluidity between Public and Private Spaces

Past scholarship argues that the purpose behind “high-life” genre paintings is to project moralizing messages to contemporary Dutch women.⁸⁹ However, I agree with more recent approaches that have pointed out these images provided audiences with multiple layers of meaning that in turn facilitated numerous views and conversations. The inclusion of specific motifs in the composition complicates the reading of a single narrative within “high-life” genre paintings. The presence of porcelain in “high-life” genre paintings is one of the components that create intricate layers of meaning beyond the limited scope of moralizing messages. It is notable that porcelain was a product made for domestic use, as were paintings that feature them. Yet porcelain as a commodity carries associations of global trade and is thus tied to the public world of commerce. I argue that porcelain complicates the discussion due to its associations with the public world while it is rendered in paintings displayed within the domestic space.

An example of a painting frequently used to discuss moralizing messages is Pieter de Hooch’s *Interior with Women beside a Linen Cupboard*, c. 1663 (Figure 9). Wayne E.

⁸⁹ See De Jongh, “Realism and Seeming Realism.” De Jongh and Hoyle, *Questions of Meaning*. Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*.

Franits, for example, uses this painting to demonstrate that genre paintings not only were shaped by cultural norms but they in turn shaped systems of belief and values of the patriarchal social order of the day.⁹⁰ Franits' visual analysis of this particular painting comes to the following conclusions: the woman to the left, wearing a black jacket and apron is a servant, while the mistress is holding the stack of linens, the activity of putting linens into a cupboard illustrates the housewife's duty to supervise and work alongside her maids; this also alludes to her responsibility to maintain the family's provisions.⁹¹ Therefore, Franits suggests that this painting likely indicates good stewardship over material possessions because the women are seen storing linen within a cupboard, an expensive commodity in the 17th century. He goes on further to identify the child in the background playing the game *colf* as a symbol of the need to work towards a clear goal so that one may live profitably. He asserts this identification, reasoning that during the game the ability to strike the ball properly in order to win requires great concentration and effort.⁹²

I do not disagree with Franits' reading of this painting but I find it to be too neat and limited. In their desire to give a single moralizing meaning to these images, scholars often overlook the complex composition that includes many components creating layers of references and messages in these paintings. Paintings, bought by the wealthy burghers and located inside their homes, are more than just lessons showing standards of behavior.

⁹⁰ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 1-5.

⁹¹ Scholars have challenged Franits' identification of the servant and mistress. See Daine Wolfthal, "Foregrounding the Background: Images of Dutch and Flemish Household Servants" in *Women and Gender in the Early Modern Low Countries*, edited by Sarah Joan Moran and Amanda Pipkin, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 229-65.

⁹² Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 104-106.

The very act of placement and viewing inserts them within the complex system of society and identity in the Dutch Republic. In the introduction of his book, Franits points out that these paintings both shaped and were shaped by the cultural conventions of this time. However, his goal simply to connect this to a woman's identity as the virtuous housewife misses the larger picture outside the frame. While he scrutinizes nearly every detail within De Hooch's painting, he ignores the two porcelain bowls painted on top of the cupboard. Why would De Hooch have decided to include the motif of porcelain bowls within this painting? More importantly, what associations did this bring to his contemporary audience?

It could be argued within Franits' framework that the inclusion of these two bowls adds to the symbolism of the dutiful housewife's good stewardship over the household belongings. This reading is plausible; however, I feel this also fails to include important associations that will further expand the analysis of De Hooch's painting. As I have argued in my last two chapters, paintings were works of artifice, in which collectors invested alongside other material goods, such as porcelain. "Exotic" China was symbolized and referenced through the export of their porcelain; however, it is my belief that this is further complicated by artistic conventions, which also domesticated the image of porcelain. What I am referring to when I state that artists "domesticated" porcelain is that their use of porcelain as a motif created a visual language for the sphere of the private home in the Dutch Republic. By taking porcelain and integrating it in their art and homes contemporary audiences also integrated porcelain in their society where it

came to symbolize social status and gender roles. They effectively took this “exotic” commodity and made it a part of the Dutch culture, “domesticating” the material good.

Artistic conventions such as choosing to place porcelain on a cupboard in a painting, illustrates the types of spaces the Dutch may have been striving for in their own homes. This adds to the layers of associations and meaning for audiences. Artists such as De Hooch, who included porcelain within their paintings not only “domesticated” this good but also did so because of its association with trade. Placing porcelain within the domestic world clearly connected it to women. However, I would argue that viewers of this work would have also understood this as a reference to their trade with China. My goal is to explore the different, sometimes conflicting, meanings conveyed by porcelain.

In this final chapter I will look at the two conflicting messages of the private domestic and public world within genre paintings. I examine the ideology of domesticity in the Dutch Republic. Additionally, I will address how the public world mixed with the private realm, creating more blurred divisions than the one presented by Dutch moralists, upon whom so many scholars rely. Elizabeth A. Honig was among the first to introduce the concept of blurred lines in her scholarship. I will draw on Honig’s ideas in my analysis of paintings in this chapter. It is important to begin by addressing how wealthy burghers would have displayed paintings and porcelain in the home and discuss their collecting habits.

Collecting Habits & Porcelain

During the 17th century the Dutch Republic was a cultural center where new technologies, scientific pursuits, and colonial expansion coalesced. This age of humanist learning among the burgher class facilitated the desire to become well read, resulting in the need for discerning intellectual collectors who were in a position to support scientific observations as well as speak to the quality and authenticity of artworks, antiques and exotica.⁹³ This knowledge would have been used to assess the quality of workmanship that went into creating specific types of porcelain goods. Skilled collectors evaluated porcelain on the smooth feel, thin vs. thick walls, as well as the craftsmanship of the painting on each piece. Both men and women fell into the category of collector and would have viewed and interacted with such goods in similar if not the same conversations.

Consumers purchased art not only for its aesthetic appeal but also as a way to gather objects that spoke to their accumulated knowledge of the world around them and its diverse cultures. The collecting of porcelain spoke to their knowledge of China. The influential role of individuals who were seen as venerable scholars was central in the age of humanist learning.⁹⁴ Learning among elite burghers also expanded to incorporate studies of non-Western cultures. As I have already contended, paintings destined for the upper stratum of society were expected to serve as conversation pieces that allowed individuals to display their identity. Each individual's purchases were directly linked to their position in society. Decisions pertaining to cultural consumption in the Dutch

⁹³ Mariët Westermann, *A Worldly Art: the Dutch Republic, 1585-1718* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 33-35, 82-86.

⁹⁴ Idea presented by Angela K. Ho in *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 40-41.

Republic followed a set criteria of excellence and understanding to further solidify each individual's inclusion in the wealthy upper class.⁹⁵ The contemporary sources included in this thesis provide a condensed version of the standards for evaluating porcelain and paintings that would have been utilized by wealthy burghers during this period in order to acquire the right kind of goods and resulting knowledge.

Angela Ho's book *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting: Repetition and Invention* makes similar inferences. She contends that paintings were not simply merchandise resulting from the artist-patron relationship, but items whose exhibition in the home continued to influence artistic production.⁹⁶ Ho's focus is mainly on artistic conventions and the repetition of motifs and less focus is given to how collectors displayed paintings in the home or how paintings may have interacted with other material objects. It is my supposition that artists had to consider how these juxtapositions shaped the reception of their work with the knowledge that paintings were displayed alongside material goods and "exotic" natural wonders. This can be related to and understood through the collection of porcelain by both men and women, and what porcelain's inclusion could have symbolized to connoisseurs in their art collections.

Collections on Display in the Home

Recent scholarship has focused on not only what items are included in paintings produced in the Dutch Republic but also in how paintings were displayed. In order to better understand how these paintings associated with the identity of both Dutch men and

⁹⁵ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 44.

⁹⁶ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 51.

women, the conditions in which these owners may have lived needs to be addressed. The quality, location and size of the home occupied by residents of the time depended heavily on the economic standing of the family. My focus here is on upper class homes after the 1640s; this exclusive group only amounted to 6-8% of the urban population.⁹⁷

Nonetheless, the Dutch Republic was unique in the fact that until the latter part of the 18th century, it enjoyed the highest standard of living in Europe. While I am focusing on the upper class specifically this does not mean that these associations wouldn't have been recognizable to other classes, especially in an environment where others strove to elevate their social standing. Therefore, some of the associations that the upper class used to define themselves would have likely been understood and emulated by the middling classes of society who would have had exposure to these types of paintings and porcelain in the art markets, newspaper advertisements, and when government buildings housing these items were open to the public.⁹⁸ This unfortunately leaves out the poorest citizens, where research is difficult to gather due to the lack of information scholars have to pull from today.

No interior from this period survives entirely intact. Therefore, it is difficult to reconstruct the arrangement of rooms and the decorations of 17th century houses with complete accuracy. However, with the use of home inventories one can infer how the Dutch utilized each space. The ways in which the upper elite utilized spaces in their home spoke to their social standing and aesthetic preferences. After the 1640s, as the general population's wealth grew, more rooms and new layouts were added to both old and new

⁹⁷ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 21.

⁹⁸ Van Campen and Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain*, 9-15, 29-35.

homes being built.⁹⁹ In the new layout of larger dwellings, the function of each room was more precisely defined. The most notable change was in the *voorhuis*, which was diminished in size making it more of an entranceway giving space for new side rooms to be added. These *zijkamers* (side rooms) appear to function mainly as reception areas, which became important for the displaying of art and material goods such as porcelain and paintings.¹⁰⁰ Guests would usually be permitted into one of the reception areas within the home that was designated by the family. Others may have been allowed into the *comptoir* (office) of the male to conduct business, although business transactions or conversations may have been conducted in one of the formal reception rooms.¹⁰¹

The social separation of space within wealthy homes created distinct areas of the home that would be designated for either public or private use. These rooms would have been gendered with designations that were either female (private) or male (public). This is apparent in architectural treatises such as the one published by a Middelburg-born bookseller Willem Goeree in 1681. He divided the household along the following lines:

In almost all cases the foremost part of the house must be reserved for the man or house father, in order to have there his shop, his office, his *salet* or consultation room, and his storage cellar etc. The women or house mother has her quarters in

⁹⁹ Before the 1640s, the ground floor of a canal residence consisted of two spaces: the *voorhuis* (front room) and the *binnenhuis* (or *binnenhaard* meaning ‘inner hearth’). The uppermost stories and the attic were used as storage space for provisions and for the drying of linen and clothes. See Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Klaske Muizelaar and Derek L. Phillips, *Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age: Paintings and People in Historical Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 38.

and around the rear rooms where also are situated the cooking and living kitchens, wash-house, and the rest of the things necessary for the housekeeping.¹⁰²

It is important to note that this division of space would have been applied exclusively to the homes of the affluent. The division of space within the home between public and private grew in popularity as a result of the publication of literature on domestic conduct. As these ideas became more prevalent within the upper elite of Dutch society, the function of rooms became more precisely defined.¹⁰³ These developments, which were determined by new tastes and fashions, increased expenditure on building programs and on luxury items and furniture.

All burgher families strove to maintain and expand property investment.

Reception rooms were curated in an effort to display the homeowner's social status to everyone visiting their home. This was an effective platform for the Dutch burgher to present his wealth to family, friends, and business associates. Paintings placed here would have been displayed alongside other material goods. Porcelain was displayed on fireplace mantels, on specially made shelves, above doorways, inside and on top of cupboards.¹⁰⁴ Porcelain on display is a feature in several of Pieter de Hooch's "high-life" genre paintings, including *Two Women Teaching a Child to Walk*, c.1668-72. The composition features a lavish interior with two women and a child and presents design choices similar to his *Interior with a Young Woman Giving a Coin to a Maid*, c.1669. The mantel above the figures heads provides a display location with four pieces of porcelain

¹⁰² Quoted in Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 29.

¹⁰³ Muizelaar and Phillips, *Picturing Men and Women*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ Mariët Westermann, H. Perry Chapman, C. Willemijn Fock, and Eric Jan Sluiter, *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt* (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders Publishers, 2001), 32-36.

in a symmetrical line just as it would have been displayed in contemporary homes from this period.

John Loughman and John Michael Montias' book, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses*, provides valuable scholarship on how contemporary Dutch families may have displayed their paintings. Their extensive analyses of inventories and other evidence reveals that the vast numbers of pictures represented in rooms not only mirror precisely each other's positions, but they also appear to correspond with the forms of furniture and architectural features.¹⁰⁵ I believe, like Loughman and Montias, that these inventories can be used to show how paintings would have been in conversation with other items in the room. I argue that the porcelain set on display within the rooms would have been one of the important elements to analyze alongside the paintings that hung near them.

Loughman and Montias examine Emmanuel de Witte's *Family in an Interior*, c.1678 (Figure 10), to discuss how specific genres of paintings would have been hung with the desire for symmetry and skying, that is, placement above eye level. They argue that this signals how many owners may have viewed their collections within a decorative hanging system. Therefore, the distinctiveness of the artwork is "subordinated to the desire for overall uniformity."¹⁰⁶ I believe this can be taken one step farther to argue that the symmetry was created throughout the rooms alongside the chosen furniture and material goods. There are three family members, a girl, man and woman located in a lavish interior with a mantle on the right wall. Two porcelain vases are located on the

¹⁰⁵ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 112.

¹⁰⁶ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 115.

mantel, next to a gilded mirror at the front of the right wall and a painting adorns the back wall where a brass chandelier hangs. The porcelain vases are placed at eye level similar to the painting of the church interior on the back wall of the composition. As Loughman and Montias have pointed out compositions of paintings are similar to many inventory descriptions showing how objects would have been placed in the homes of Dutch burghers. The porcelain in the painting is located in a symmetrical design and on the same plane as the painting on the back wall. This arrangement shows how porcelain may have been situated in the home and in conversation with other material goods such as paintings. This would have spoken to the homeowner's social status and their worldly knowledge.

This design convention can also be seen in both Pieter de Hooch's paintings *Interior with Women beside a Linen Cupboard*, c.1663 (Figure 9), and *Portrait of a Family playing Music*, c.1663 (Figure 11). Porcelain bowls and vases have been placed in much the same manner on top of a cupboard and on a mantel within the same viewing level of the paintings detailed within the compositions. As discussed in the first chapter, we must remember that these are works of artifice and artists were highly selective with what they depicted. Their main concern was to sell their art, so they selected themes and subjects that appealed to potential buyers. The sheer volume of paintings that included figures clothed in expensive fabrics within an interior surrounded by luxurious objects, speaks to what was seen as fashionable.¹⁰⁷ The Dutch painting consumer wanted convincing representations of everyday appearances and experiences. Such paintings

¹⁰⁷ Helmers and Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion*, 281.

most likely functioned as an ideal elegant home for the couples positioning them inside their houses. As a result, it is unlikely that artists would have significantly deviated from actual practices used to furnish Dutch homes.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, I argue that porcelain and paintings must have been placed within similar interior design layouts like those created by artists' compositions in genre paintings. These types of interior design would have related material goods to one another such as porcelain being in conversation with paintings.

Genre Paintings and Domesticity

During the 17th century the Dutch household was an important component of Dutch society. The home was seen as both a microcosm, and an essential component of the properly governed commonwealth; therefore, Dutch art was increasingly placed within the home. It is notable that the home was known as the “feminine” sphere, placing art in an increasingly female dominated domain. In the Netherlands it was believed that a family household was, to quote contemporary Dr. Johan Beverwijck, the “foundation and source” of authority.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the home substantiated the whole fabric of the commonwealth and government. Beverwijck continued by stating that the experienced and knowledgeable Holland householder “was the very foundation of our prosperity and it is still today the basis on which every household must be built.”¹¹⁰ It is here that scholar Simon Schama claims, in his book *The Embarrassment of Riches* that housewifery was

¹⁰⁸ Loughman and Montias. *Public and Private Spaces*, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: an Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, (New York: Knopf, 1987), 386.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 386.

recommended by moralists with such urgency as the only fit job for women because, left to herself, the female was a dangerously unsound vessel.¹¹¹ Therefore, domestic images present both proper and improper ways to live and run a household.

According to Calvinist theologians a good marriage required a commitment to love, remaining faithful to one's spouse, and a concern for his or her spiritual and physical welfare.¹¹² In this context the couple were expected to inhabit a traditional partnership where men and women had specific duties defined by their sex. The husband was expected to protect and provide for his family while his wife maintained the home. The primary focus for theologians was a wife as helpmate who always deferred to their husbands' superior judgment. This type of understanding is what scholars must draw upon today when discussing the moralizing messages found within "high-life" genre paintings.

The popular Dutch moralist Jacob Cats, author of influential homilies on the subject of domestic life, elaborates on these notions in his popular book *Houwelijk* (Marriage), first published in 1625. Scholars have long used Cats' publications to argue that genre paintings were simply meant as moralizing messages to teach their audiences what was expected of the perfect housewife. Cats' formula for the perfect housewife calls for a woman to be: "not too sweet, not too sour; not too shy, not too bold; not too inspired, not too salty; not too wise, not too foolish," and so on for many lines, summing

¹¹¹ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 400.

¹¹² Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 67-68. Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 134.

up with “a wife of great discretion.”¹¹³ The ideal husband should be at once sober, honorable, and affectionate, “a prince of the household, who knows how to love and house rule.”¹¹⁴ Along with sobriety and decorum, a housewife is also expected to possess solid organizational skills as the house manager. With their husband’s permission they were also given certain financial freedoms. In particular, women were responsible for attaining household provisions and transacted business affairs in their husband’s absence.

Patriarchal rhetoric dominates domestic literature during this period. It has been established that women needed to be capable of overseeing business and financial affairs both as they related to the home and business. Conversely, they were expected to submit to their husband’s authority regardless of their competence. Wives who aspired to success in the public domain would have been chastised as aspiring to heights reserved for their male counterparts. Male anxieties about women’s position in society were fueled by the belief that the home is of supreme importance in determining the moral fate of both individuals and Dutch society as a whole.¹¹⁵ The skills and knowledge of women were important because the art of household management was established as basic training for broader economic skills.

Pieter de Hooch’s *Interior with a Young Woman Giving a Coin to a Maid*, c.1669 is an illustration of household management. The interior of the home includes many luxury items. There is a composition of three figures at the center of the work, the lady of the house is seated on the left, and a maid stands in the center next to her with a small

¹¹³ Quoted in Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes*, 134.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes*, 134.

¹¹⁵ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 386.

child to her right pulling on her skirts. The left wall of the room features a small table draped with an oriental rug holding a glass, a platter, and a glass jug below an open window that has four frames and extends to the timber beam ceiling. On the back wall above the lady's head is a mirror with a large gilded frame, next to a large mantel where a painting hangs and many pieces of porcelain are displayed in a symmetrical line. The lady of the house is dressed in silk skirts and a fur lined jacket, she has a sewing cushion on her lap and extends her hand to give the maid a coin.

Images such as this have been read by art historians who follow the moralist tract as a dutiful housewife employed in domestic affairs. Beverwijck says, "man all outside work is your affair; and all that occurs indoors is your wife's."¹¹⁶ Until recently, the association of women confined to the home has been widely assumed. As noted by several art historians, in reality women were not sequestered to the home. At a minimum, they travelled to the markets in order to secure household supplies. This painting, I would argue, is a perfect reminder that women were not only stewards of the home but were also involved outside the home. The fact that the head of the house is handing money to another woman as the child points outside the frame alludes to the outside world. The porcelain above the woman's head could also echo these types of associations. Owners of both "high-life" genre paintings and porcelain interacted with these objects creating different ways to participate with elite segments of society.

An interior home setting with two figures is portrayed in Johannes Vermeer's *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*, c.1658-61. Seated at a table next to a window, the girl is

¹¹⁶ Hollander, "Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter De Hooch," 281.

interrupted by a man leaning over her shoulder examining the paper in her hand. On the table in front of her is sheet music, an instrument, and a porcelain jug. This displays a scene within the private home showing a woman occupied in an approved pastime. However, as Honig has pointed out, the boundaries of domesticity were continuous and troublesome rather than fixed into a single neat ideal. Artwork is identifiable as an item fully integrated in the “domestic” sphere, however, it moves between spaces that are public and private, as well as those areas defined as male or female. The acquisition of paintings as well as the resulting discussion by elites conforms to and pushes the boundaries of conventional divisions.

As the images by Vermeer and De Hooch show, these artists are creating visual testimonies that support the invention of different types of elite identities within the social sphere. Honig believes a paintings’ “power” resulted from the ability to mediate between spaces.¹¹⁷ These paintings were able to mediate between spaces as a result of artists’ use of different motifs and compositions. Certain motifs and artistic innovations such as rooms leading into other areas, open doors, etc. may have spoken to the mixing of the public and private spheres. I believe that the inclusion of porcelain as a motif in these paintings complicates the interpretations of paintings as an example of women being confined specifically to the home. Porcelain moves beyond its simplified classification of kitchenware in inventory lists. Porcelain was present as an affluent tea set, artwork, exotica, and trade good representing Dutch nationalism. In this way porcelain also moves

¹¹⁷ Honig, “The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,” 188.

between public and private spheres as well as between traditionally male and female spaces.

Women and Collecting Habits

Scholarship has long regarded the collection of porcelain in the Dutch Republic as a predominantly female pursuit. The growing association with the arrival of tea, coffee, and chocolate from Asia, created a specialized craze that resulted in afternoon tea parties. Women practiced the domestic ritual of serving tea where distinctive behavior was marked by refined manners, genteel conversation, composure and relaxation.¹¹⁸ Women acquired expensive silver teapots, porcelain cups and saucers, as well as similar kinds of services for coffee and chocolate to use during their hours spent drinking tea with company.¹¹⁹ Other arguments for porcelain's association with women are due to its classification as kitchenware. When reviewing inheritance laws and marriage contracts porcelain is an item placed within female ownership.¹²⁰ The bride's dowry, for example, included linens, tea sets, porcelain, and jewelry brought into the household upon marriage. After 1640 women spent time taking tea in rooms designated for female use, often specifically designed to showcase porcelain. Abraham Snaphaen's *Henrietta Catherine of Orange at tea with her daughters*, c.1686, showcases the practice of upper class women participating in the ritual of taking tea.

¹¹⁸ Cordula Bischoff, "Women Collectors and the rise of the porcelain cabinet" in Jan van Campen and Titus M. Eliens, *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers 2014), 183.

¹¹⁹ Bischoff, "Women Collectors," 171.

¹²⁰ Bischoff, "Women Collectors," 184-185.

The wife of Stadholder Frederick Henery, Amalia von Solms-Branunfels (widowed in 1648) created one of the earliest attested rooms for porcelain, at the *Huis ten Bosch and Noordeinde* Palace in The Hague.¹²¹ The room at Huis ten Bosch was the first of its kind that was completely decorated in a “Chinese style.” An existing example of “Chinese style rooms from this period can be seen at the Stadholder’s residence at Leeuwarden (Figure 12). Additionally, rooms appeared in an altered form in men’s apartments that featured porcelain and collections of exotica. These types of rooms would have been curated in order to present an association of prestige for wealthy women. It is notable that this room would have also placed value on products that were explicitly Dutch traded goods, additionally presenting a national identity. As discussed in the first two chapters, this national identity is associated with the Dutch pride in their trade network. By associating women with these types of objects within the domestic realm the Dutch are essentially domesticating Chinese porcelain. However, this does not mean the association with the “exotic” outside world is no longer applicable. In fact I would argue porcelain represents both, just as genre paintings would have multiple associations so too did porcelain.

Historian Woodruff Smith has noted that consumer behavior surrounding luxury items is influenced by the cultural associations placed on these objects. Consumer patterns show a perceptual response to the activity of collecting and associated fantasies that make up their perceived identity.¹²² By fantasies Woodruff is referring to the context

¹²¹ Bischoff, “Women Collectors,” 171.

¹²² Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 67-76.

of luxury within not only the idealized standards of their society but also through their fascination with the “exotic.” This fascination and association with the pieces wealthy burghers purchased created an idealized version of the types of exotica and identity associations to which they subscribed when constructing their identity. This provided an avenue wherein they compared themselves and their values to those around them as well as to cultures outside the Dutch Republic.

Females in Dutch society displayed an elevated status by hosting and participating in the suitable ritual of tea parties. Due to the expense required to procure the correct porcelain vessels, tea and accoutrements this luxury pastime was the marker of a prestigious lifestyle.¹²³ I would contend that in addition to luxury this would speak to both the worldly knowledge necessary to acquire quality porcelain and the ability to lead possible discussion about porcelain and the foreign locations where they were produced. This also spoke to a display of their nationalistic pride in Dutch trade networks. In works such as the “high-life” genre paintings portrayed by Pieter de Hooch the inclusion of porcelain in domestic scenes may have been viewed by women and related to these practices and knowledge of “exotic” China.

When examining the collecting habits of Dutch women and their display of objects, surviving dollhouses owned by the wives of regents and merchants in the uppermost strata of society are convincing sources of evidence. They provide valuable clues about the arrangements and furnishings of rooms and Dutch houses. Dollhouses reveal a strong sense of domesticity and good housekeeping, as well as an interest in

¹²³ Bischoff, “Women Collectors,” 183.

display and comfort. Petronella de la Court had a dollhouse built in an exact replica of her home between 1670 and 1690. It seems that no detail was overlooked, including a tiny book lined alcove, a *comptoir* located over the *voorhuis*. This remarkable feat of artistry included duplicated furnishings right down to commissioned miniature wall murals and replicated paintings in the *saletkamer* and *konstkamer*.¹²⁴ The few remaining dollhouses extant today reveal luxury items that spoke to the fantastical desires of the Dutch version of domestic perfection (Figure 13). In reality replicating these types of display in actual Dutch homes would have been largely unattainable due to the wealth necessary to amass collections of this magnitude. Ownership of dollhouses, porcelain, and genre paintings spoke to intellectual pursuits of female collectors, allowing them to participate in and strive to conform to unrealistic ideals.

The Collecting Habits of Men

It is important to point out that both men and women were collectors of porcelain. Scholarship supports the male activity of purchasing and collecting of porcelain but I feel it has been overshadowed by the need to associate porcelain as a prominent item in female collections. The inventory taken of Abraham Heijblom's possessions upon his death in 1685 is a good example of a male in possession of a significant amount of porcelain.¹²⁵ A member of the Electoral College responsible for nominating town counselors and magistrates in the city of Dordrecht, and a local apothecary, he possessed

¹²⁴ Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes*, 125.

¹²⁵ Innovatory located in Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, Appendix G.

one of the largest collections of paintings (over 120) in Dordrecht.¹²⁶ His inventory shows that he owned seven houses and 1/16 share in a ship. Six of these homes show rental income and the home he inhabited appears to have been attached to his apothecary's shop.¹²⁷

Heijblom's sizable amount of porcelain was located throughout his home. There were three kitchens in the home with porcelain present in each. The presence of the "lower great hall" as first in the itemization appears to have been designed to function as welcome area and entertainment space. There were 10 porcelain pieces in this space including three large pots with lids. As an apothecary it is possible that the lidded vessels functioned as utilitarian pieces.¹²⁸ A novelty during this period was the production of Chinese export porcelain and delftware in sets of three and five for home display. The Swedish kitchen appears to have been designated a feminine space suitable to display large amounts of porcelain "over the cupboards and elsewhere."¹²⁹ A smaller third kitchen located in the basement included a small display of porcelain. An upper back room with a bed boasted a joinery cupboard with linen and porcelain.¹³⁰ The opulently appointed upstairs front room appears to have functioned as a dressing room/study for the homeowner. This is inferred by the presence of Heijblom's clothing, most likely stored in the ebony block cupboard and an oak lectern with a pedestal.¹³¹ This room boasted one framed drawing, 19 paintings and most notably 19 pieces of porcelain. Display objects

¹²⁶ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 91.

¹²⁷ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 91.

¹²⁸ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 91-96.

¹²⁹ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 95-96.

¹³⁰ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 95-98.

¹³¹ Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 97-98.

included alabaster figures and panels, a large shell collection, and a drinking horn with a lid.¹³²

Heijblom's upstairs front room and the *pronkkeukenor* housing the largest amount of porcelain provides associations with both male and female identity. The fact that 19 pieces of porcelain were displayed alongside 19 paintings shows that these material goods were prominent in a symmetrical design and placed in conversation with one another. Heijblom's design decision to place these luxury objects within a room designated for his singular use shows his vision for his own identity and reputation. He is exhibiting that he is a learned collector whose objects and art reflect his perceptual knowledge of the world. These paintings and objects are then related to the empirical interests of this age of observation and humanist learning. Scholars can use this type of evidence in conjunction with written histories, travel guides and treatises on art to infer the types of conversations that would have accompanied visitors and family within this room. Heijblom displays both his success and national pride through the porcelain that played a central role in his curated collection. Porcelain's role is central not only in the home but also in Dutch trade overseas. By placing porcelain in spaces designated for both male and female use it becomes a unique material object with multiple layers of associations.

Public and Private Spaces

¹³² John Loughman, and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, 97-98.

I believe that associations between women at home and the VOC could be seen as a type of blurred division between the public and private spaces when viewing the motif of porcelain within “high-life” genre paintings. Images such as Johannes Vermeer’s *Woman Reading a Letter at an Open Window*, c. 1657-59 have been interpreted in past scholarship as displaying the story of courtship between a man and woman. Timothy Brook’s work *Vermeer’s Hat* argues that the display of tumbled fruit in the porcelain bowl is used to signify the woman’s tumble of emotions.¹³³ While I think Brook takes his assessment about the woman’s emotions connected to the fruit too far, his connection between the letter and the bowl, which he does not elaborate on has far more interesting connotations. I agree that this scene may signify a letter between a courting couple or a husband and a wife. Brook briefly suggested that the man’s occupation could be associated with trade because of the seascape and porcelain bowl. My assertion is that contemporaries could have associated these two items with the VOC and their merchants resulting in a blurred division.

Honig’s research has pointed out that the boundaries of domesticity were fluid rather than fixed and these demarcations were in fact a result of the boundaries imposed by the citizenry and their social standing.¹³⁴ She argues the ideology of domesticity functions as a social signifier for the whole of society. Honig points out that in reality women would not have been confined to the home in the same ways moralists would like us to believe. This in turn also shows that the home would not have been nearly as

¹³³ Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat: the Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 54-56.

¹³⁴ Honig, “The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,” 188-199.

“feminine” as artists portrayed. She argues that artists used their works in an effort to provide imagined solutions for these problems of lived experiences.¹³⁵ Honig’s work only focuses on images of women in the marketplace and scenes within the *voorhuis* as indicators of these blurred distinctions between the public and private spheres. While this was a great beginning for conversation within this discourse I believe there is more to unpack, porcelain being just one of those things.

Porcelain’s immediate association with China and the VOC’s trade provides scholars with even more information on the anxieties presented in the misogynistic rhetoric of the period. The language from Nieuhof’s travel account that describes both the Indonesians on Batavia and Chinese men can be linked to the popular treaties and histories used to describe the Dutch. When the Dutch recorded their own histories they wrote about their people, mariners, and country’s cultural significance in a global setting. They believed their destiny was tied to global conflicts that must be fought in order to secure their wealth and lands.¹³⁶ The generation after 1640 related their continued fight for control of overseas trade to their predecessors thwarting the Spanish Counter-Reformation in the Northern Netherlands. They saw themselves as the upstanding embodiment of moral superiority over the tyrannical rule of outside parties.¹³⁷

The Dutch presented and understood themselves as exceptional, while the women were virtuous, hard-working and house proud the men were also diligent, prudent in their investments and honorable in business dealings. This is in direct contrast to their vicious

¹³⁵ Honig, “The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,” 188-199.

¹³⁶ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 52-53.

¹³⁷ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 52-53.

and uncivilized opponents documented in fiercely patriotic histories.¹³⁸ Identifications of domestic virtues were found in treatises and handbooks discussing proper conduct for both men and women. Their pride in their industry, moral rectitude, and success as a nation can be linked with how they viewed themselves as well as people outside of the Republic. Nieuhof's description of the "exotic" men and women as heathens who are glutens, proud, deceitful, impudent and untrustworthy places them in a category that is less than Dutch men and women. The Dutch were moral, industrious, hardworking men and women, superior to the "heathens." The fascination with Chinese material goods was painted in a different light, those craftsmen were ingenious, laborious, but still idolaters. This permitted the Dutch to have an association with their goods but only in so much as they have the power and knowledge to trade and take these things home to domesticate them into their own culture.

The inclusion of porcelain may have symbolized this domestication, however, the boundaries between public and private space as identified through material goods and paintings show the crossover from quiet domestic space as it alludes to the worldliness of Dutch trade.¹³⁹ Landscapes, seascapes, and views out windows and doors became conventional devices for all manner of interior scenes, whether employed in portraits, domestic or courtship scenes. Pieter de Hooch's *Interior with a Woman Knitting and a Maid with a Girl*, c.1673 is an example of how boundaries between private and public may have been seen in 'high-life' genre paintings. This interior portrayal shows the left corner of a room with an open door in the corner of the back wall. The left wall has a

¹³⁸ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 88.

¹³⁹ Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes*, 182.

square table draped with an oriental rug and birdcage located below an open window. The back wall from left to right features the open door with landscape visible beyond and a large painting with a gilded frame above the door. To the right of the door is a large cupboard with porcelain displayed on top with a second painting hanging behind the porcelain and above the cupboard. A woman is seated knitting; a child stands in the center holding the hand of a maid who leads the child away. Artistic conventions of displaying a wealth of luxury objects in the home may have assisted consumers in the establishment of their social standing. The artistic choice to include porcelain in interior scenes such as this would have helped to build on these types of associations. I contend that layers of meaning could have been discussed in affluent circles pertaining to the female role in the community, “exotic” China, and the act of collecting.

It is my belief that porcelain added to this intermixing and understanding of the private and public world. I also think this alludes to male anxieties about the reality of women mixing with these two worlds. Men’s belief that women were vulnerable to carnal and material temptation was written about and often seen in their art. It is intriguing that porcelain is associated with the domestic world, while it also signifies “exotic”, “hedonistic” China, the very thing that women were meant to be shielded from by being confined to the home. This brings us back to the “domestication” of this good by Dutch artists and men trading who believed in their superior position. Their intellectual interest makes these material goods acceptable to own and appreciate. As collections of art and exotica became ingrained in the domestic focus, women may have also been buyers of these types of art and exotica, a concept that those who follow the limited moralist school

of thought would not have recognized. We must account for both a male and female gaze. As stated earlier porcelain collections, rooms, and genre images would have been used to define identity and signify social station to visitors entering the home. As shown throughout this chapter, the inclusion of porcelain not only plays a part in the domestic language of “high-life” genre paintings but also reveals male anxieties about the mixing of public and private spheres. Because porcelain is associated with women, men, and worldly humanistic knowledge of “exotic” cultures this interplay of conflicting ideals about the virtuous private home and the public world come together into one space for contemporaries to enjoy and discuss in order to demonstrate their own identity within this complex society.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the motif of porcelain in 17th century Dutch “high-life” genre paintings. “High-life” genre paintings are works of artifice that present scholars with an analytic tool to explore how Dutch society understood themselves and the world around them. I am not arguing that these images depict everyday realities; I believe that genre images are clever constructions by artists who are both responding to and constructing trends during their era. Consumers who purchased these types of paintings typically belonged to an exclusive socioeconomic group at the upper echelons of society in the Dutch Republic. This group of wealthy burghers both participated in and created new codes of conduct that facilitated their desire to be seen as members of the upper elite in Dutch society. These “codes of civility” affected how genre images were created and presented. Until recently, art historians argued that “high-life” genre paintings’ sole purpose was to instruct and delight their audiences on moral lessons and behavior, but recent scholarship has shown it was not that simple.

As I have revealed throughout this thesis, motifs and subject matter depicted in “high-life” genre images created multiple layers of associations for their contemporary audiences. There are not hidden messages within genre paintings; artists made deliberate choices when deciding what to include in their works of art. The intended audience would have easily identified these images and objects. The inclusion of porcelain was

utilized by many contemporary artists of the period. I have argued that the thoughtful inclusion of porcelain within “high-life” genre paintings complicates past beliefs that these paintings simply depict moral codes of conduct. It is my conviction that the inclusion of porcelain not only enriches the visual language of domesticity but also speaks to the Dutch national pride in their trade, and their worldly knowledge of the “exotic.”

The VOC was a source of wealth for the Dutch Republic and their expanding middle and upper-class citizens. When purchasing porcelain collectors would have been demonstrating not only their wealth and status but also pride in Dutch trade and knowledge of China. Travel accounts provide a visual language illustrating how the Dutch understood China and its people. These accounts depicted China as an “exotic” place with both clever craftsman and shifty merchants. The Dutch believed themselves to be morally superior to external cultures, identifying outside places with the luxury goods they produced. The act of collecting and displaying porcelain gave wealthy burghers the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the outside world, show pride in Dutch trade, and signify their wealth to peers. Artists would have understood this when selecting porcelain as a motif in their genre paintings. Paintings would have been displayed adjacent to purchasers’ collections of porcelain and exotica, therefore, artists must have been aware of this when determining what objects to include in their compositions. They helped to both create and participate in the way outside cultures were visually represented and understood in Dutch society.

Dutch fascination with porcelain can be seen not only in still life images but also “high-life” genre paintings. It is thought provoking that porcelain has been deliberately included in images that are identified as depictions of the private domestic realm. I have shown that the inclusion of porcelain within domestic scenes adds to the visual language of domesticity. Women were collectors of both porcelain and paintings just like their male counterparts. However, these images do not depict the reality that Dutch moralists desperately hoped to portray. Unlike the women in these paintings, contemporary women were not exclusively confined to the home. It is my belief that the inclusion of motifs such as porcelain may have also spoken to male anxieties about the reality of women and their exposure to the public and private world.

The ownership of “high-life” genre paintings may have been a way for wealthy burghers to identify with, strive for, and participate in standards of the time. Porcelain’s inclusion as a motif contributes to the feeling of luxury, while also referencing Dutch nationalistic pride, humanistic pursuits, and domesticity for consumers. Porcelain is only one motif included in this analysis of “high-life” genre images. Motifs such as this create multiple layers of meaning that would have drawn in wealthy consumers to purchase and admire such works. These devices speak to the blurred divisions between public and private life that art historians are continuing to explore. It is my hope that I have added to the research on the complications that blur these divisions. Further scholarship is needed to expand upon how the placement of “high-life” genre paintings within the home’s “feminine sphere” may have spoken to a female gaze and the blurred lines of the public and private world.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Gerard ter Borch the Younger, *Curiosity*, c. 1660-62. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 62.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules Bache Collection, New York, NY.



Figure 2: Gerard Ter Borch the Younger, *The Suitor's Visit*, c. 1658. Oil on Canvas, 80 x 75 cm. National Gallery of Art, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, Washington, DC.



Figure 3: Pieter de Hooch, *Man Handing a Letter to a Woman in the Entrance Hall of a House*, c. 1670. Oil on canvas, 68 x 59 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 4: Pieter de Hooch, *The Greeting*, c. 1675. Oil on canvas 86.2 x 70.33 cm. National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection), Washington, DC.



Figure 5: Caspar Netscher, *Company Making Music*, c. 1665. Oil on panel, 44 x 35.7 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Figure 6: Quiringh Gerritsz. van Brekelenkam, *Family Group in an Interior*, c. 1658-60. Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 73.3 cm. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 7: Johannes Vermeer, *A Maid Asleep*, c. 1656-57. Oil on canvas, 87.6 x 76.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, New York, NY.



Figure 8: Pieter de Hooch, *Leisure Time in an Elegant Setting*, c. 1663-65. Oil on canvas, 58.3 x 69.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, New York, NY.



Figure 9: Pieter de Hooch, *Interior with Women beside a Linen Cupboard*, c. 1663. Oil on canvas 70 x 75.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 10: Emmanuel de Witte, *Family in an Interior*, c. 1678. Oil on canvas, 68.5 x 86.5 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen - Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Figure 11: Pieter de Hooch, *Portrait of a Family Playing Music*, c. 1663. Oil on canvas, 98.7 x 116.7 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund, Cleveland, OH.



Figure 12: Anonymous, Lacquer room for the Court of the Stadholders at Leeuwarden, the apartment of the consort of the Frisian stadholder, Princess Albertine Agnes of Orange and Nassau, c. before 1695. Limewood and coromandel lacquer. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 13: Anonymous, Dolls' house of Petronella Oortman, c.1686-1710. Wood, metal, glass, marble, paper, silk, and yarn. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

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BIOGRAPHY

Adriana Baker is originally from Bel Air, Maryland. She received her BA in Art History in 2017 from George Mason University, where she graduated Cum Laude. Adriana is interested in the impact that trade routes have on cross-cultural exchange, the production of material culture and art in the Baroque period. While working towards her Master's in Art History she served, as the president of the Art History Graduate Association, received the Graduate Student Leadership Award for her excellence in community building within the art history program and wider community, worked as a teacher's assistant at George Mason, volunteered as a Gallery Guide at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and worked as a Gallery Assistant for the Greater Reston Arts Center. Adriana received her Master of Arts in Art History from George Mason University in 2020.